

# SURFACE CREEK NEWS

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## 40 years of SCVHS: The homesteaders come to the Surface Creek Valley

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The Surface Creek Valley was among the last places where Native Americans lived during the early 1880s. That was until a treaty in 1880 took all of the Ute Indian land in Western Colorado, resulting in most of the native Utes being removed to a new reservation in eastern Utah by 1882.

As the Surface Creek Valley Historical Society celebrates 40 years, society vice president Jerry McHugh explained one of the biggest historical turning points for Cedaredge — the town's incorporation in 1907.

"The election for incorporation was held at the Independent Lumber Company office in Cedaredge," McHugh said.

That lumber company is now familiar to the community as Big John's Lumber. To this day, Cedaredge's lumber vendor sits in the same location as it did in the early 20th century. After the meeting at Independent Lumber, which took place Feb. 12, 1907, the incorporation papers were filed with the Delta County Clerk on March 25, 1907.

As far as the land for the town was concerned, it almost entirely came from ranching and farming land. For example, the Bar-I Ranch contributed 10 of its 874 acres of property to the town.

"What is now Main Street used to be called Cedar Mesa Street," McHugh said, adding, "and so the Bar-I [Ranch] was south of there and north of there was other land owners and, gosh, there's at least four different parcels that were mapped out."

An iconic piece of the Bar-I Ranch from the early days of Cedaredge is the farmhouse, along with three silos. The significance here is the house and the silos all still stand and

In the May 17, 1907 edition of *The Surface Creek Champion*, nearly three full pages of the newspaper were dedicated to notifying the community of the initial 24-part ordinance for the town, which concerned finances, a town

have never been moved.

The Pioneer Town Museum was built around the Bar-I farmhouse. The silos can be seen from the highway over the top of the museum's entrance. According to McHugh, the silos were constructed between 1916 and 1918.

"The silos have never moved, that's where they've always been," McHugh said. "They were built where they sit now." The Bar-I ran through the location of the museum, and the land of the Town of Cedaredge was carved out of the Bar-I property.

The Bar-I was initially formed in November of 1889 and was also called the Surface Creek Livestock Company. It formed when John Lengren, Augustus Vogel, Thomas H. Powers, Henry Kohler and Thor Thompson combined properties. Later owners of the ranch were the Stockham Brothers and James Zaninette.

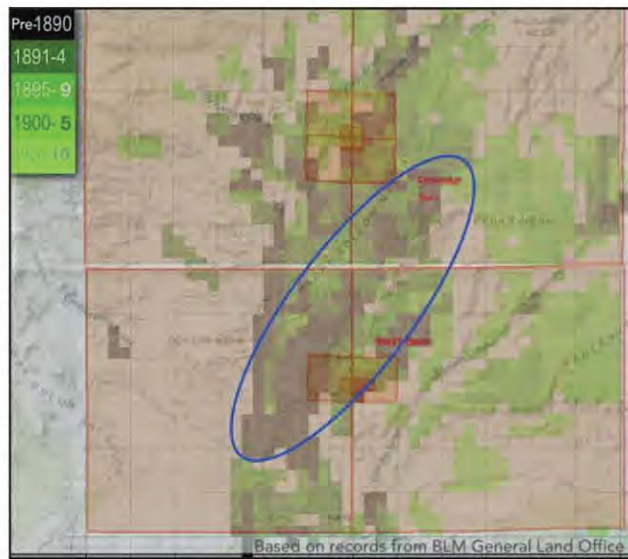
As of the end of December 1906, the petition to incorporate Cedaredge as a town was filed at a time when the proposed town had 212 certified inhabitants on 440 acres of land. Comparatively speaking, as of the 2018 census, Cedaredge had a population of 2,266 people on approximately 1,253 acres of land.

According to McHugh, the early settlers of the Surface Creek Valley, following the removal of the native Utes, could claim 160 acres of land under the Homestead Act. By 1891, the Surface Creek Valley held 122 homesteads.

"Life wasn't easy for the homesteaders," McHugh said. "To fulfill the terms of these government land patents, homesteaders had to put the land to use, clear it, cultivate it, and raise crops or livestock on it [and] live on it for at

least five years." McHugh said that, due to the high demand of these requirements, most of the settlers didn't stay.

With the start of the town, Cedaredge had approximate-



**Map of settlers throughout the incorporation of Cedaredge. The blue circled area represents the earliest homesteaders who settled on the banks of Surface Creek, mainly in the late 19th century before Cedaredge's incorporation in 1907.**

ly 20 businesses. The land for the town consisted mainly of property owned by Stockham and Zaninette on the south side of Main Street and John Jeutter on the north side. In the beginning, there were hardly over 200 residents. Settlements began near Surface Creek for irrigation reasons, but it later

spread outward from there as settlers created smaller ditches from the creek.

Cedaredge preserved certain aspects of its heritage, including but not limited to farming and ranching land, and the history of early 20th century Cedaredge continues to be preserved in the Pioneer Town Museum.

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The Town of Cedaredge was incorporated in April of 1907, making it approximately 113 years old today. Each step of the process of the incorporation of the Town of Cedaredge was documented in the local newspaper at the time, *The Surface Creek Champion*, which was restored and digitized in its entirety last year, as explained in the DCI article, "40 years of Surface Creek Valley Historical Society: Old Surface Creek newspaper goes digital, available online."

The first town meeting following the incorporation, along with the first municipal election, took place on April 15, during which the town's first mayor,

C.S. Blanchard, took office. Also at this meeting, which gathered interests from the community regarding the future of the town, a controversial topic arose regarding whether the Town of Cedaredge should have a saloon. The community overwhelmingly voted against it.

"The only bone of contention was the question of whether the town should have a saloon or go without and this roused a great deal of discussion and some strong feeling was presented by both sides," the April 19, 1907 edition of *The Surface Creek Champion* reported. "However, it was clearly demonstrated that the community did not want the saloon as the vote stood over two to one against such an institution." The proposal for a saloon failed 55-22.