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English IV

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24 September 2010

Parker History

In 1869, the only people that came through the town of Parker were a few trappers, government surveyors, stage drivers, travelers going from Springfield to Flandreau or Yankton to Sioux Falls, and soldiers on pursuit of Indians. Like many small towns, Parker, SD has a vast history from its start to its special events to its key figureheads; its history can be seen through its buildings/landmarks, and businesses. The development of the town involves a complicated history, creative businesses, special events, and major figure heads.

At one time, Parker was nothing but unsettled land, only a few visitors every now and then passing through. In August 21, 1879, established by the Chicago Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad; Parker was named after the Chief Engineer’s wife’s maiden name and ownership was given to George W. Sanborn. A short while later Moses Burpee started plotting lots, blocks, streets and alleys for the town of Parker. (Then and Now)

In January 13, 1871, William Aurner, V. Thielman, and Lewis Elliott were appointed commissioners of Turner County where they located the first courthouse at Swan Lake it was a 12 by 12. Vale Thielman was the chairman of commissioners, county clerk, surveyor and deputy treasurer until others were appointed. The first election was held in 1869 only five votes were casted. They were trying to decide which town could be the county seat. Due to the fact Swan Lake had no railroad; they thought maybe they should elect a different town to have the courthouse. The first towns in the running were Parker, Marion junction, and Swan Lake, none of the towns could get the necessary two- thirds vote to win the county seat. Around 1882 Hurley decided to join the competition for the seat because the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad started building in Hurley (the railroad is no longer there). In the third election, there was no change in the voting, which caused many people to become upset. But before the last election, a sum of 10,000 dollars was put up by the citizens and supporters of Parker for the county seat, but when it came the time for the money nobody could find it; because it wasn’t really there. Many people felt that they were cheated and Parker acted in bad faith. (Then and Now)



One of the first Parker’s schools began December 20, 1879, with 23 pupils. The teacher was Mr. Alberty; he made on average $40.00 per month. From January to March, there was an enrollment of 40 students. With the growing of the town in 1888, they started construction on the new school. They had an auction and the old school sold for $250 to use as a jail. The first graduation was held at the new building on July 6, 1886. In 1896 they built on six more rooms to the school; in 1898 the third story was finished to allow more high school rooms. In 1904- 1905 there was city water for the school and also steam heating installed. In 1939, the new gym was built, which is now our small gym. In 1956 the north wing was build which consist of grade school and the band room which is now our art room. The Big gym, cafeteria and VoAg room were build in 1973 at that time there were 565 students attending Parker. (Then and Now)

The first sport to be played in Parker was football back in 1901, the team consisted of eight players most of them were businessmen and were coached by Doctor Formanack. The game was much different than it is today: they had three plays rather than twenty plays; they were allowed to punt and drop kick their opponents. Many people in Parker were very against this sport because they thought it was too rough and foolish. Unlike Parker football these days, everyone brought their own uniforms which consisted of blue and white striped jerseys, breeches, headgear, and shoes. The first towns they competed with were Canton, Mitchell, Yankton, and Sioux Falls. In 1908 after seven years of hard practice on Main Street Parker made it to the championship where they defeated Mitchell four to one. (Then and Now)

There were many unique buildings in Parker-, some which are still standing. The Parker Lumber yard was the first building built, so they could build other houses and building. It is still in use today and is located in the same spot. Another unique feature about Parker was a neat little well on the corner of Main and Second Street where people would go to get water. A Hook and Ladder Company (Fire Department) was put up to secure safety in the town. Mr. Steninger was in charge of the first Telephone. He ran the company from his home, and his wife was the operator. She would have to get up in the middle of the night to connect calls to each other. It cost a person $1.50 a month and $2.00 for a business; it would cost $0.50 for extension, and rural rates were $12.00 per year.( Then and Now)

Along with the old buildings in Parker there are many new ones too. This helps Parker improve its up keeping of the town.

Recently Parker has had two new companies move in. One is called Puzzles; it will be a bowling alley, mini golf, and a sports bar. This place will be kid oriented, which is what Parker needs to draw young families here. Also a sports bar called T.J. Kernels was just build by one of our locals. Using one of our old more run downed buildings constructed it into a fun bar where people can go and hang out with friends and family.

There have been many churches throughout Parker’s history, for a small town that is a lot, giving the people of Parker many options to choose from. One of the first churches was the First Baptist Church; it was organized in 1872 by a pastor and his wife in the small town of Finlay, in 1879; the church moved into Parker because the railroad had come to town. The next church was the Catholic Church in 1885; many Catholics did not have anywhere to go to church so they had to build a church for them. Another church was the Church of Good Samaritan in 1878; this was a place where any religion could go to pray. By those who can recall its early day, they preached about love and laughter. It is now located at the Sioux Empire Fair in Sioux Falls, SD. Grace Lutheran Church started being constructed in March 1940 with only thirty- six members; their first pastor was a professor from Augustana College in Sioux Falls. Another Church was the First English Lutheran Church; this church is parts of the Lutheran Churches know as the Missouri Synod. It was first used by the Methodist Church but after First English bought it, they remolded it by adding new stained glass windows, new pews, new alter railings, and a new organ. Years later, they installed all new carpet. A large office and entrance has been added since then. The First Methodist Church is over 100 years old. It was built in the 1880s; there were only 13 members at first. It is still in the same spot and still in use today. The First Presbyterian Church was organized in November 16, 1879 it is now a fitness center. ( Then and Now)

As a small town there are many special events that happen. The fair is one of the major traditions that happen in Parker is the Turner County Fair.

The Fair started in 1880 on October 13th-16th. Records show that it was held on the Devereaux property which north on the corner of the road and leads to Rosehill Cemetery in Parker. There was a race track and ball diamond constructed along with a bride connecting the end of Second Street to the fair grounds.

The first day of the fair went well; many people showed up for the numerous events. The second day it started to drizzle and by the third day it was snowing very hard. This continued for three days. Some fair goers had to find shelter in haystacks on the way home.

In 1881 the fair was moved to Swan Lake, because they were the county seat holder at the time. Then the dispute about where the county seat should be held arrived and as we know Parker was elected to have the county seat. In the 1886 a publication was printed reading “TO our friends and patrons, we desire to call your special attention to your duty as citizens of Turner County without regard to your locality, North, South, East, or West, of building up our fair, both by your money in taking shares of stock and by your presence matter how much we may differ on other points. Come to the fair, bring your families, your livestock, and your farm products, and we will have the best county fair in Dakota.” By this article I am assuming Parker was having a tough time getting people to attend the fair due to the fact many wear still upset about Parker getting the County Seat.( Turner County Fair)

According to the Turner County Fair website, in the 1990’s a prairie fire broke out destroying many buildings and killing many cattle and race horses.The year 1941, W.P.A helped to build the new fair grounds which is located in the same spot as it is today. Because of World War II there was no fair in 1943.In 1946 there was also no 4-H involvement due to a break out of polio.

Throughout the year of 1987- 2001 many new buildings were build; including new expo building, new covered show ring, new 4-H buildings, new steel dairy building and many more.

June 24, 2003 an F-2 Tornado strikes with winds up to 157 m.p.h, wires were down and many building were destroyed. The year 2005, Turner County Fair celebrated its 125th year. That year they also made improvements and additions which include, paving the streets in the fairgrounds and put in sidewalks, gave Heritage Park a new look, add a new food court area, and moved the V.F.W Bingo stand.

Traditions are what makes a small town special and unique. It is good that we all come together as a community and celebrate. Some of the traditions include Homecoming, Hometown Christmas, Fall festival. (Turner County Fair)

During Homecoming in Parker, the kids start off the week with dress-up days; also on that Monday the crown the king and queen. Later that night everyone gathers at a house for a fire and supper. On Wednesday the high school kids along with the junior high head out to the track for some fun and competitions. To end the week the community comes together for a parade and the football game.

Hometown Christmas is another tradition Parker has. We celebrate it with Santa down at the fire hall for the kids, a parade, and bingo at the school after the parade with a supper along with it.

The Fall Festival happens every year in September, there are a variety of activities some included the traditional turtle race; this is where a person catches a turtle and races them against other turtles, there are also stands set up and people can come and sell their items, then at the end there is a supper.

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In a small town such as Parker a sheriff is important to watch over the county, and do duties such as making arrests, enforcing all state and local laws, transporting prisoners, and serving legal papers. Our first sheriff was Wm. Conway he was elected in 1870 he server for 2 year as sheriff of Turner County.

Over the years there has been many Superintends in the school; the first superintend was A.N. Wray in 1912.

Because Parker has such a strong past, its future is looking very bright. It is very important and interesting to learn the history and culture of our town. ( Then and Now)

Annotated Works Cited

Hurley Herald. Turner County Register of Deeds 1998.

This source gave me name of the first people to run our town.

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| J id. Ingles, David J.  "Map of the month: Chicago & north Western system, 1930.” *Trains* 1 Aug. 2002: Research Library, ProQuest. Web.  7 Oct. 2010. |

Kant, Jonita. Southeast Region Vol.III. Dallas: Taylor Publishing CO., 1987

In this source, I have found many pictures and useful information to help me with my project.

Parker High School 1889-2000. Pamphlet NP. ND.

In this pamphlet, there are many interesting facts about the school and the history of the school. Along with a lists of graduates from 1889 to 2000 .

Smith, Viola. Bits of Parker Heritage. Parker: Viola Smith, 1989

In this source, there is a lot of information about buildings, our railroads, and the history of Parker with many interesting facts

“The Homestead Era.” Turner County Register of Deeds, 1998

This source will help me know how much territory there is parker and the county lines.

Turner Auxiliary of Post No. 2821. Then And Now 1879-1979 Centennial Book. Parker: Viola Smith, 1979.

In this source I have found a lot of information about the history of Parker from the years 1879 through 1989. There is information on the courthouse, local swimming pool, churches and many other landscapes and building.

“Turner County.” Turner County Register of Deeds 1998

This source helps me find the information needed in how Parker became a town.