

Winston

The area below Spokane Butte (some believed the butte to be named by Lewis and Clark on their way through the Missouri Valley) has been home to a number of small towns since homesteaders found their way into the area.

The first noted town in the area was Beaver Creek (also known as Beaver Town), a hamlet located 18 miles southeast of Helena where the water of the creek is diverted into the two French Bar ditches. The 1880 census credited the town with a population of 14. The townsite of Beaver Creek (actually located on Staubach Creek) was located on a very swampy area. Each new business that located in the town built a little higher from the creek bottom in the direction of the railroad siding called the Placer siding. In 1889, Beaver Creek gave way to the Town of Placer located at the railroad siding.

The town and the siding were in low ground that was swampy and hard to start the trains again in either direction after stopping at the siding. An auxiliary engine was used to get the trains "over the hump".

Gold was discovered in the area and many mines were established from the French Bar near the confluence of Beaver Creek and the Missouri River to the Elkhorn Mountains west of the town of Placer. The population of the area grew as mines opened and miners moved into the area.

The East Pacific mine was located southwest of Beaver Creek in the Elkhorn Mountains along Weasel Creek. Two brothers from Minneapolis took a contract for hauling ore from the East Pacific mine to the railroad. The Winston Brothers were instrumental in getting a new siding built on higher ground about a mile south of Placer. The siding was named the Winston siding.

The original town plot of Winston was set in 1892. Around the end of 1894 or the beginning of 1895, Winston became the community center of the area and the town of Placer moved to the Winston community.

Winston's best days were between 1896 and 1910. The town grew rapidly and at one time had several saloons, five general merchandise stores, two doctors, several hotels and even had a newspaper – The Winston Prospector.

The Durnen Hotel in Winston had a dining hall that fed up to two hundred people at one time.

The town even had three “hurdy gurdy houses” run by local madams.

But as so many mining towns in Broadwater County, as the mines played out and the price of minerals fluctuated the towns populations waned. Like Diamond City and Hassel, the population of the town of Winston slowly dwindled to a few people.

This article is based on information from the “Broadwater Bygones” available at the Broadwater County Museum.