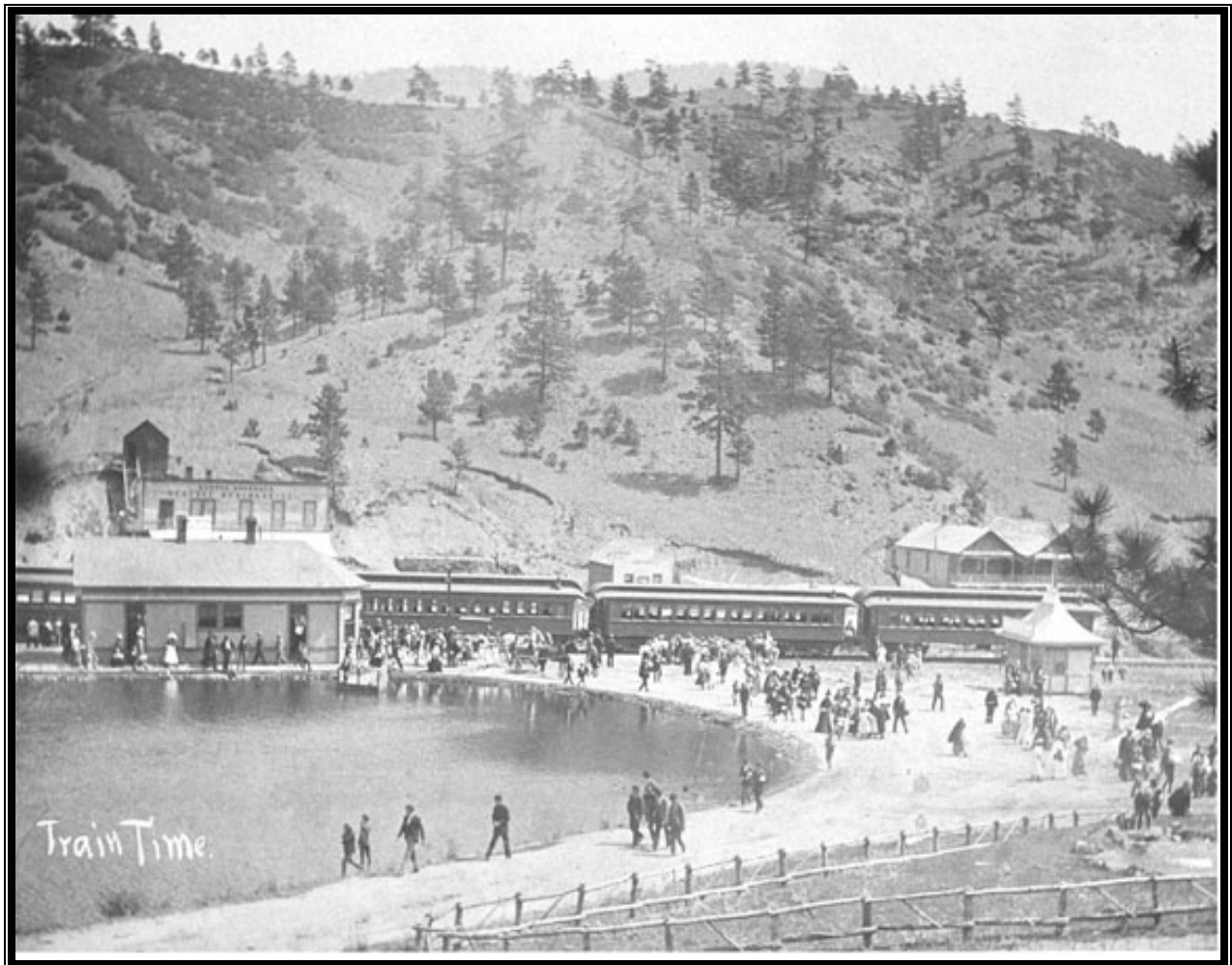


CHAPTER II.

THE TOWN OF GREEN MOUNTAIN FALLS



c.1890 Photo. Train Time. Colorado Midland Railway train arrival. UPHS-Wellington Collection



2.1 TOWN PERSPECTIVE

The Town of Green Mountain Falls is north of Pikes Peak and is 11 miles west of Colorado Springs just off U.S. Highway 24. At an altitude of 7,800 feet, the Town is set in a picturesque narrow mountain valley surrounded on three sides by Pike National Forest. The El Paso County/Teller County line goes North - South through Green Mountain Falls. Sixty two percent (62%) of the town is in El Paso County. Thirty eight percent (38%) is in Teller County. Natural assets include three creeks, waterfalls, a lake, rugged cliffs, forests, wildflowers, and abundant wildlife.

Green Mountain Falls is a quiet and peaceful mountain town with a year-round population of 915 (2006 estimate). The number of people in Town increases significantly in the summer as people from other states arrives to use their family cabins. These people are commonly called “summer residents” and they bring a sense of tradition and a love for the community.

Architecturally, the Town has a variety of rustic summer log cabins and Victorian houses mixed with newer homes. The Town’s character is reflected in the preservation of historic structures including the original land office building, hotels, and the Church in the Wildwood. The Town’s focal point is an 1890 Victorian gazebo on an island in a small lake.

The Town location supports a unique life style by providing a beautiful natural setting for a mountain home close to the employment opportunities, services, and culture of a nearby large city.

2.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to the arrival of explorers and settlers, the nomadic Ute Indians established a trail along Fountain Creek past the site of present day Green Mountain Falls. Their path would later become a major transportation route from Colorado Springs into the mountains. The construction of the Colorado Midland Railway up Ute Pass opened up a new era of resort life. In 1887, W.J. Foster bought a ranch from George Howard in order to build a new resort and town site. He named the place Green Mountain Falls. In the summer of 1888, the Town Company started developing streets, dug a lake, built a gazebo, and a put up a three-story hotel. By July, an estimated 500 people were living in furnished hardback tents rented at \$4 to \$7 a week.

The Town was incorporated in 1890. People visited the resort from Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas to escape fierce summer heat. They returned later to build family cabins and Victorian style homes. Many of these early homes have been passed down from generation to generation.

In the early 1900’s, the Ute Pass hotels were losing their fashionable image and most burned down. The railroad ended passenger service in 1923 and ceased all operations in 1949. The Town began a steady transition from predominantly summer only residents to primarily year round residents.

In the 1970’s Colorado Springs began experiencing explosive growth and, correspondingly, the Green Mountain Falls population jumped from 179 in 1960 to 607 in 1980 (U.S. Census figures). More and more people moved to Green Mountain Falls to escape the noise and frenzy of the big city. The trend continues.



MAP 1: REGIONAL CONTEXT



2.3 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Green Mountain Falls greatest asset is the natural environment. The Town and its citizens must strive to protect it and be fully aware of the complex relationship between human activity and the surrounding land, water, and air.

2.4 TOPOGRAPHY

Green Mountain Falls lies in a narrow valley with very steep mountain slopes. Elevations range from 7,670 feet at the east entrance to Town on Ute Pass Avenue to 9,400 feet on Mount Rebecca in the southwest corner of Town. The Gazebo Lake, in the middle of the business district, is at 7,800 feet. The high ends of Hondo Ave, Catamount Street, and Boulder Street are at about 8,000 feet. The elongated Red Devil Mountain north of the Gazebo Lake rises to 8,000 feet and shields the Town from busy US Highway 24.

2.5 CLIMATE

Mainly because of the altitude, Green Mountain Falls features relatively cool summers that have historically attracted people from the hot flatlands of Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas. For the past ten years, the highest recorded temperature was 87° F with an average summer high of 72° F. Winters are generally mild with only one or two weeks of very cold weather. The lowest recorded temperature over the past 10 years was -18° F. The average winter high is about 35° F. Homes on the steep north facing slopes may see snow accumulations of 12-24 inches of snow during parts of the winter. Average annual precipitation is 20 inches, and average snowfall is about 70 inches. There are about 175 days a year when skies are clear and the sun shines at least part of the day over 300 days.

2.6 GEOLOGY AND SOILS

The geology and soils found in Town vary and are important to land use and development. Steep slopes with unstable soil conditions require special engineering design of building foundations, roads, and drainage. All designs are reviewed for adequacy by the Pikes Peak Regional Building Department and Teller County Building Department. Soil conditions also dictate the engineering design of septic systems.

Geologic hazards include rockfalls, debris fans, unstable slopes, and faults. Potential rockfall areas are on the steep slopes along the southern portions of the Town and on the face of Red Devil Mountain. Debris fans are located along Crystal Creek near Boulder Street and Garfield Avenue and along Catamount Creek from Hondo Avenue to Belvidere by the end of Midland Avenue. Debris fan hazards include flooding, deposition of debris carried by water, and rapidly changing of stream channels. Unstable slopes are subject to displacement during periods of high precipitation and runoff. The Ute Pass Fault runs generally from the northwest to southeast corner of Town.



Map 2: Town Base Map



2.7 SURFACE WATER

The major surface water features in Green Mountain Falls are Catamount Creek, Crystal Creek, Fountain Creek, and Gazebo Lake. Catamount Creek and Crystal Creek are outflows from Colorado Springs Utilities reservoirs located south of Town and 1400 feet higher than the Town. The dams for these reservoirs prevent flooding. The Colorado Springs Utilities controls the daily rate of flow down the steep slopes to the Town. A minimum flow provides enough water for scenic waterfalls and a maximum flow limit prevents excessive erosion and scouring of the streambeds. During the early days, of Green Mountain Falls, Crystal Creek had a spectacular 40-foot high falls visible from Town and US Highway 24. However, in the late 1960's, the City reduced the flow of Crystal Creek so the falls disappeared. There is sentiment to restore the falls.

Fountain Creek originates in Woodland Park and flows eastward through the heart of town. It has no flood control. On rare occasions, minor flooding has occurred during heavy rainstorms. The most recent testing has not revealed degradation of water quality from the septic systems in Town.

The Gazebo Lake is filled by diverting some of the water flowing in Catamount Creek. It is designated a minor reservoir by the Colorado Springs Utilities which owns the water rights. The surface area is about 1.8 acres and it is about 10 feet deep at its deepest point. The average depth of the lake is shallow making it too warm for a fish habitat. Some aeration is provided by a fountain. Fish supplied by the Colorado Fish & Game Department are in the Lake only a short time before they are caught by fishermen. The water is occasionally muddy from surface runoff mostly from the Town's gravel streets and some from bank erosion. At the inlet, silt deposits form a "delta" that requires periodic dredging.

2.8 TREES

Residents of Green Mountain Falls literally live in a forest. Not only is most of the Town heavily wooded, it is also bordered on three sides by Pike National Forest. Trees are an essential part of the beauty of Green Mountain but they also pose the threat of a forest fire that could quickly destroy the Town.

The suppression of forest fires and the lack of resources for good forest management in Pike National Forest have resulted in the Town being surrounded by an "old growth" forest with heavy fuel loading with no fire break. Compounding the situation was a long drought that dried out the forest floor and weakened the trees resistance to disease, beetles, parasites, and fire.

The huge Haymen Forest Fire of 2002 created a new awareness and concern and the Town began an aggressive program of public education on how to mitigate the hazards of wild land fires. Residents are reacting by creating defensible zones around their homes and reducing fuel loading. The Town set an example with mitigation on street rights of way and other public property.

In 2006, the Town initiated a strong program to address the spread of bark beetles by encouraging the cutting and removal of infested trees. A new Town ordinance has been met with voluntary compliance. The Ute Pass Community Wild land Protection Plan is currently under development.

