

# Rural Valley Sesquicentennial Celebration 1830 1980



East End Main Street, Rural Valley, Pa.

1977 COPY BY RICHARD COARLO



East End Main Street - Rural Valley, Pa.

*We thank all organizations and individuals  
 who helped or participated in the*

**RURAL VALLEY**

**SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION.**

**SESQUICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE**

Chairman - Donald E. Brinkley  
 Co-Chairman - Mildred Hillard  
 Co-Chairman - Frances Calaric  
 Treasurer - Clyde Moore  
 Ass't. Treasurer - Sally Labino  
 Parade Marshal - Charles D. Moore  
 Guy Spera  
 Ronald Shoop  
 Keith Moore  
 Thomas Sunderlin

# History of Rural Valley 1830-1980

When John Patterson came to Armstrong County from Washington County in 1829 he settled on land along Cowanshannock (Brier) Creek previously owned by the Indians, claimed by the French and in the early nineteenth century purchased by his grandfather, William Findley.

In 1830 he named that part of the Cowanshannock valley east of Greendale "Rural Valley" and May 19, 1830 established the Rural Valley post office in his residence. He became the first post master.

In 1836 John Patterson laid out Rural Village on the west end of the Pickering and Company tract number eleven which he had purchased from Hamlet Totten. The plot extended east from Cemetery Avenue to Washington Avenue. There were twenty lots on each side of the street.

In 1839 Alexander Foster Sr. and his son, Alexander Jr., sold twenty more lots on each side of the street west of Cemetery Avenue.

Although the Clearfield Pike (Route 85) from Kittanning to Clearfield was authorized by an act of legislature February 17, 1831, it was not completed until 1845 and remained a toll road until 1857.

Because of poor transportation and because so called roads to other parts of the county were trails limited to horse back travel and walking, Rural Village soon became a needed trading center for early settlers and farmers.

In 1836 John Patterson moved the post office to Rural Village and the same year Thompson Purviance opened a store.

During the next forty years many businesses came to the village. The assessment list of 1876 is indicative of the needs and the life style of the people: merchants-4, mason-1, printer-1, blacksmiths-3, carpenters-2, justice of the peace-1, wagon makers-3, laborers-4, shoemakers-2, tailor-1, artist-1, innkeepers-2.

The Presbyterian Church organized August 1, 1835 by Blairsville Presbytery was the first church in Rural Valley. The first minister was Joseph Painter, who gave one fourth of his time to the Rural Valley church and three fourths to the Kittanning church. "His yearly salary was \$80.00 payable in produce at market price in Kittanning."

The original log meeting house, twenty-four by twenty-four feet square, was built near the present Old Presbyterian Cemetery which is located back of the Elgin Cemetery north of Route 85 and near the Margaret Road cut-off. It was used not only for church services but also as a school. This in all probability was the first school in Rural Valley.

Within two years the question of removal of the Presbyterian Church to Rural Village became a hotly contested issue. It might be termed the first church controversy in Rural Valley.

Since a large majority voted to go to Rural Village, a brick church was rapidly built on land donated by Alexander Foster for the church and cemetery. In 1849 when the walls began to bulge a new frame church was constructed farther down the hill on two lots given to the church by John Patterson.

In 1892 the old frame church was torn down and the present United Presbyterian Church building was erected on the same site.

When Rev. James D. Mason came to the Rural Valley Presbyterian church in 1845 he started a select school for the teaching of Latin, Greek, and mathematics. When Rev. Cochran Forbes came to the church three years later, he continued the operation of the school. When Rev. Mr. Forbes received a call to another church, John McElroy taught the students and moved the school to a building which he had erected on his own premises at 934 Main Street. This school was discontinued in 1884.



Photo before 1914 Brick Street



Main Street - Rural Valley. Loretta Nelson Home on right.

Smith in his 1883 edition of the "History of Armstrong County" states that the Presbyterians sold the old brick church to the Cowanshannock School District. It was razed and a school more adaptable for school purposes was built on the old foundation.

It was in this building that Mr. Smith conducted a Teachers' Institute in which "much attention was devoted to the rudiments, which had been too much neglected." The teachers also complained of the "severe examinations" he had given them.

In 1876 in the school district the average monthly salaries of male teachers was \$34.00 and that of female teachers a dollar more.

Prior to the organization of the Rural Valley Methodist Church in 1851 as part of the Dayton Circuit, prayer meetings and preaching services were held in the home of John Stoops.

The first church building was erected on the site where the present church now stands. Unfortunately, as the roof was being put on a violent wind storm wrecked almost the entire building and it had to be reconstructed.

August 20, 1892 the Methodist congregation let a contract to W.S. Elgin and D.H. Foster to build the present church.

Since both the Methodists and the Presbyterians were rebuilding at the same time, each held services on alternate Sundays in the old Presbyterian Church farther up the hill.

Tomb stones in the old cemeteries in the area reveal that health care for the early settlers left much to be desired. Many women died giving birth to their children and many babies were lost during their first summer to cholera infantum. Typhoid fever, small pox, pneumonia, children's diseases and acute indigestion which was probably a heart attack took their toll.

Money was scarce and conveniences unknown.

Until the turn of the century Cowanshannock Township (Incorporated 1848) of which Rural Village was a part had an agrarian economy.

However, with the discovery of vast resources of gas and coal an exciting new era of change occurred.

In June 1892 the first gas well, located on the Andrew Gallagher farm a half mile southwest of the Village and later owned by Cowanshannock Coal and Coke Company, proved to be a good producer.

Leases for coal lands were taken as early as 1891 but many were never bought and interest in coal lagged.

However, in March 1899 Lucius W. Robinson, Arthur G. Yates for whom Yatesboro was named and Adrian Islin, owners of the Cowanshannock Coal and Coke Company, purchased the first coal lands in the township. These land sales brought \$400,000.00 to the local economy in a very short time.

Since coal mines and railroads were interdependent, an eight mile track from the Buffalo, Rochester and Pittsburgh Railroad at Echo was begun July 12, 1899 and completed to Yatesboro prior to January 1, 1900.

The Coal Boom had begun.

Rural Village was incorporated into the borough of Rural Valley in 1900. The large Kroh farm at the west end of town was divided into lots which were advertised in Hosick's "History of Rural Valley Cowanshannock Township and Vicinity". Part of the advertisement is quoted: "Here is the place to buy and build if you wish to secure any of the immense trade which will soon be carried on in the valley! Come soon and buy while the lots remain at the low price of \$100 each."

Financiers from New York, mine superintendents, builders, immigrants from Italy, Middle Europe, Scotland and Sweden came to the area to inspect, to supervise and to work.

The Coal companies paternalistically cared for the needs of their employees and although many rebelled against the system, perhaps it was

needed because the work and culture of many of the immigrants had been vastly different.

Farmers who had sold their farms and/or mineral rights came to Rural Valley and built new homes. Rural Valley National Bank, which is now known as The People's National Bank of Rural Valley was incorporated. With so much news available the Rural Valley Advance began publication January 2, 1901. Hardware, furniture, clothing and food stores, cleaners and butcher shops and many others made Rural Valley a good shopping center. A creamery, canning factory and a grist mill were built. Livery stables were opened.

An ordinance for a water system was approved by Council August 21, 1905 and a Fire Company was organized in 1907. The Cowanshannock Coal and Coke Company provided 25 cycle electric power to the community until the West Penn Power Company in 1929 installed lines and 60 cycle was available. Telephones were installed; boardwalks were built to be replaced later by concrete walks.

Although the town residents could go by rail to Dayton and Punxsutawney, transportation to Kittanning had always been a problem. Only by building a section of the Clearfield Pike to Rural Village themselves prior to 1845 were they able to get the commonwealth to reroute the road to the village. In spring and fall it was almost impossible to get to Kittanning because of the mud and "chuck holes"; in winter snow drifts impeded the traveler.

For many years a stage coach operated between Meredith and Kittanning. Later "jitney" service followed by bus service was available.

When Route 85 was finally completed in 1924, Rural Valley was finally out of the mud.

No doubt because many Swedish people were Lutherans Rev. J.M. Hankey of near-by Pleasant Union Evangelical Lutheran Church began holding church services in the Yatesboro School Building. In 1902 the Rural Valley Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized and moved to the building now occupied by the William Penn Association on West Main Street.

In 1913 the congregation bought the brick Grace Reformed church and parsonage on the site where the present church is located. In 1929 the church was struck by lightning and extensive repairs were needed.

When a tornado ripped through Rural Valley June 23, 1944 the church was totally destroyed with the exception of the tower which was badly damaged. The church was rebuilt at a cost of \$27,000.00 supplied by members and friends. Presently the Congregational Development Center provides the pastoral ministry.



Main Street - Rural Valley.

Rural Valley in 1911 replaced the frame school building on the corner of South Water Street and Sunset Street with a four room brick building on the site of the present bank building. In 1917 it was enlarged by the addition of four rooms which provided space for High School classes. By 1921 Rural Valley had a four year accredited High School.

In 1946 the Cowanshannock Township - Rural Valley Joint School District was formed. The Elementary School locations remained unchanged, but Sagamore School became a Junior High and Yatesboro School, a Senior High School.

In 1954 The Shannock Union School District included all schools in the township and the borough and it became an independent administrative unit in the Armstrong County School Reorganization Plan. Two years later Atwood joined the union.

With the completion of a new High School building at Rural Valley in 1956 all High School students were sent there. In 1963 all elementary children were transferred to the new Elementary School beside the High School.

Shannock Valley Attendance Area, as it is known today, was created in 1966. In 1973 the Elementary School was enlarged. Two years later the Shannock Valley Memorial Hall was replaced by a gymnasium and class rooms were added to the High School.

June 18, 1977 a tornado again struck Rural Valley and damaged the High School and many homes.

The 1979 valuation of the Shannock Valley Attendance Area buildings was \$7,033,957.

It is with nostalgia that Rural Valley residents recall the annual visits of the gypsies and medicine shows, going to the "movies", picnics at Gourley's Grove, dances, skating and concerts at the Band Stand.

Baseball was a way of life in the nineteen forties and fifties. As many as four or five thousand fans attended Sunday afternoon ball games.

Rural Valley people have always enthusiastically planned and enjoyed community celebrations. They celebrated the completion of Route 85 on November 11, 1924 with a parade estimated to have been twelve miles long. Two thousand people attended the hundredth anniversary of the founding of Rural Valley and enjoyed the parade and renewing of old acquaintances.

The Rural Valley Bicentennial Celebration began June 29, 1976 with a union Vesper Service at the High School. The Shannock Valley Elementary children presented a "Colonial Collage" Day during which the school bell from the old brick school building on Main Street was rededicated and a time capsule was buried. There were window displays, dancing and a parade. The Armstrong County Mounted Posse took the Rededication Pledges to the Declaration of Independence signed by 2,100 residents to Clarion from where they were carried by the transcontinental Wagon Train to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The old Presbyterian Cemetery was restored.

During the past eighty years Rural Valley residents have had the same problems as others: World Wars I and II, the 1918 influenza epidemic, the Great Depression beginning in 1928, labor strikes, rise in crime and anti-social organizations such as the Black Hand and the Klu-Klux-Klan.

A decline in the coal market during the Depression and from which there was no recovery until World War II; strikes during the nineteen forties and the subsequent replacement of railroad steam locomotives with diesel engines; and the fact that the production of coal had shifted from Pennsylvania to the non-union mines in West Virginia caused a closing of many mines.

In 1950 the Rochester and Pittsburgh Coal Company, which had acquired the mines at Sagamore, Yatesboro, Margaret and NuMine, closed these mines. Three years earlier the company had sold the properties at the mines to Kovalchick Salvage Company. Many families left the area to find employment elsewhere.

According to a 1976 Summary of Mined Areas of Southwestern Pennsylvania at least one coal vein has been completely mined in the Yatesboro-Rural Valley and Sagamore areas.

Coal was no longer "king".

In the past thirty years Rural Valley, situated in Cowanshannock Township which is thought to be the best gas producing area in Pennsylvania, has become a residential community of well kept homes.

With an area of 2.1 square miles it is one of the two largest boroughs in Armstrong County. 1980 census records show a population of 1,028. There are 411 houses within the borough, twenty-two of which are over a hundred years old. The house at 817 Main Street was built with brick kilned in the borough. Rolling Hills, Southside Plan of Lots, Brionrode and Kimlan Meadows are housing developments in the borough.

Well-trained firemen, a police department shared with Cowanshannock Township, ambulance service, emergency medical technicians, professionals and businesses serve the needs of Rural Valley residents. A Medical Center is in the planning stage.

There are a number of social clubs, Scouts and a summer recreation program for children and adults.

Meals on Wheels, Nutritive Meals, the Helping Hand Clothing Store are helping organizations within the community.

Rural Valley is indeed a good place to live.



East Main Street. Rural Valley Band stand before 1924. Fire Hall now (1976) occupies space.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Leader Times
- School Records
- Interviews
- History of Kittanning Presbytery

## RURAL VALLEY COUNCIL

- Mayor - Guy Spera
- President - Harvey Schrecengost
- Thomas Krizmanich      Louis Levri
- Richard Scripps      Lillian Moore
- Louis Labino      Ronald Shoop
- Secretary - John McConnell
- Water Commissioner - Fred Keller
- Water Department - Gladys McKnight
- Tax Collector - Helen Troutman
- Assessor - Linda Brown
- Chief of Police of Rural Valley and  
Cowanshannock Township  
Richard Leonard

# PROGRAM

## Rural Valley Sesquicentennial Celebration

November 8, 1980 - November 9, 1980

### HOME DECORATIONS

### STORE WINDOW DISPLAYS

#### SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 1980

1 P.M. Parade from Cosgrove Post #523 of the American Legion to the Presbyterian Church  
Dedication of Sesquicentennial Plaque at the People's National Bank by Harry M. Fox, Armstrong County Commissioner

2 P.M. - 6 P.M. Fun Fair at Shannock Valley Senior High School Gymnasium  
Display of quilts and hobbies at Rural Valley Firehall by Senior Citizens and Firemen's Auxiliary

8 P.M. - 11 P.M. Square Dance at Senior High School Gymnasium. During intermission there will be a Fashion Show of Costumes of Bygone Days  
Funnel Cakes, Sandwiches, Drinks  
Ellenberger's Garage, Cowanshannock Ave.

#### SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 1980

11 A.M. Chicken Bar-b-que and Funnel Cakes at the American Legion  
Horse Shoes  
"Pick Up" Old Timers Ball game  
Display of Antique Engines

2 P.M. - 6 P.M. Display of quilts and hobbies at Rural Valley Firehall

3 P.M. Country Music by the Skunk Hollow Boys at the American Legion

*All Events are Free except Food, Drinks, and Fun Fair.*

## Patrons

American Legion - 1920  
Ammerman's Farm Equipment - 1951  
Brown's Clothing Store - 1977  
Brownie's Barber Shop - 1957  
Bart's Hoagie Hut - 1979  
Opal Brinkley's Beauty Shop - 1974  
Buffone Sporting Goods - 1979  
Boyer Potato Chips - 1940  
Business & Professional  
Women's Club - 1931  
Bishop Funeral Home - 1968  
(Chalmers Edwards - 1952)  
R.V. Coradi, Public Accounting - 1959  
Roy Carson Funeral Home - 1951  
Calarie & Calarie Attorneys -  
1934 1977  
Dorothy Cogley's Beauty Shop - 1940  
Same location as grandmother's  
shop.  
Colo's - 1946  
The Draft House - 1978  
Dimaio's Market - 1925  
Ding-A-Lings - 1968  
Dixon's Market - 1973  
C.D. Moore - 1931  
End Zone Lounge & Restaurant - 1980  
85 Building Center - 1978  
Ronald D. Hayes Inc. - 1974  
Raymond C. Hayes Trucking Inc.  
- 1973  
Lavoskey Electric - 1940  
Lisle James, District Justice - 1953  
King's Drug Store - 1927

Janice H. Krizmanich Beauty Shop  
- 1980  
Keystone Inn - 1977  
Landmark & Car Wash - 1975  
Moore's Hardware - 1958  
Established - 1899  
M/M Contracting - 1978  
McIntire's T.V. - 1974  
McLachlan Ridge Homes - 1952  
Rural Valley Construction Co. - 1946  
Dealer for Ridge Homes  
Curley Moore Chevrolet - 1955  
Mickey's Service Station - 1968  
Maffei's Restaurant - 1933-48, 1975  
Maffei's Beauty Shop - 1938  
Prietas Beauty Shop - 1963  
Palilla's - 1915  
The People's National Bank - 1933  
Rural Valley National Bank - 1902  
Passerini Sales and Service - 1933  
W.H. Pitts M.D. - 1952  
William Penn Association, Branch 88  
1908 Reactivated - 1914  
Al Russo's Barber Shop - 1934  
Established 1911  
Rural Valley Lion's Club - 1939  
Rural Valley Lumber Co. - 1903  
Rural Valley Bakery - 1921  
Schreck's Exxon - 1940  
1921 with Huber as partner  
David Sparks DDS - 1976  
Sunset Grove - 1979  
Valley Manor - 1970

Valley Restaurant - 1978  
West Penn Power Co. - 1929  
Wingard's CB Sales and Service - 1973  
Dates indicate when businesses were  
established.



West End Main Street - Rural Valley



West End Main Street - Rural Valley  
Avi's Tavern - Yatesboro