

Off The Beaten Path

A Paved Road Provides A Community With Peaceful Isolation

Yearly Tax Receipts Total \$768 in Atwood, Armstrong County

Just a few hours away from the hustle of the city, quiet, almost forgotten communities are scattered through Western Pennsylvania. Some once were the centers of booming activity. Others always have quietly existed since their beginnings. Below is the fifth and last of a series on these towns.

By FRANK SNYDER

Sleepy town on the hill. Miles from the smoke of Rural Valley and close to the memories of 1868 and the origin of Allison's Crossroads.

Gone from the scene are the doctor, the druggist, the blacksmith, the harnessmaker, the milliner, the tanner and the shoemaker—all who deserted the borough of Atwood for the progress of the traveled highway.

Kittanning lies but 16 miles to the west and occasionally hears of this forgotten borough of Armstrong County, but only the yellow clay of its crossroads and a few of the old family names of its settlers survive the decline of Atwood's heyday.

Road Avoided Town

Atwood's way of forgetfulness was paved many years ago with the first hard road between Kittanning and Indiana. It removed the borough from the "beaten track" and almost overnight robbed it of its postoffice, hotel and most of its tradesmen.

Of the borough's original 13 business places, but two general stores remain. One of these, founded by J. D. McLean, is now being operated by the third generation of that family.

And the McLean general store is a good place to learn some of Atwood's interesting history. Squire S. A. McLean, of the second generation, has the borough's data pretty well memorized.

"The present burgess of Atwood?" asks Squire McLean, a lean, bald man of 63. "Well, we don't exactly have a burgess right now."

"Yes . . . you see, my son there is the burgess, but he hasn't been sworn in for this term yet." The squire indicates a young man of about 27 who is standing behind the counter and engaged in a business deal with a traveling salesman.

"Had a chance for some CWA work last winter," Burgess S. Reid McLean later explains. "We postponed the swearing in ceremony because I couldn't have gotten one of the jobs as a public official."

Two CWA Projects

The CWA work on which Burgess McLean was employed was the red-dogging of Sagamore Road and the moving of Atwood's one-room schoolhouse and the grading of the schoolyard. That is about as far as the New Deal has benefited Atwood.

Burgess McLean is serving his second term in that office. He was barely out of high school when elected the first time. His father has been holding the "squire's" job since he was a young man.

Atwood's borough council holds no regular meetings. When there's any work to be done the body meets at the home of J. W. Cuddy.

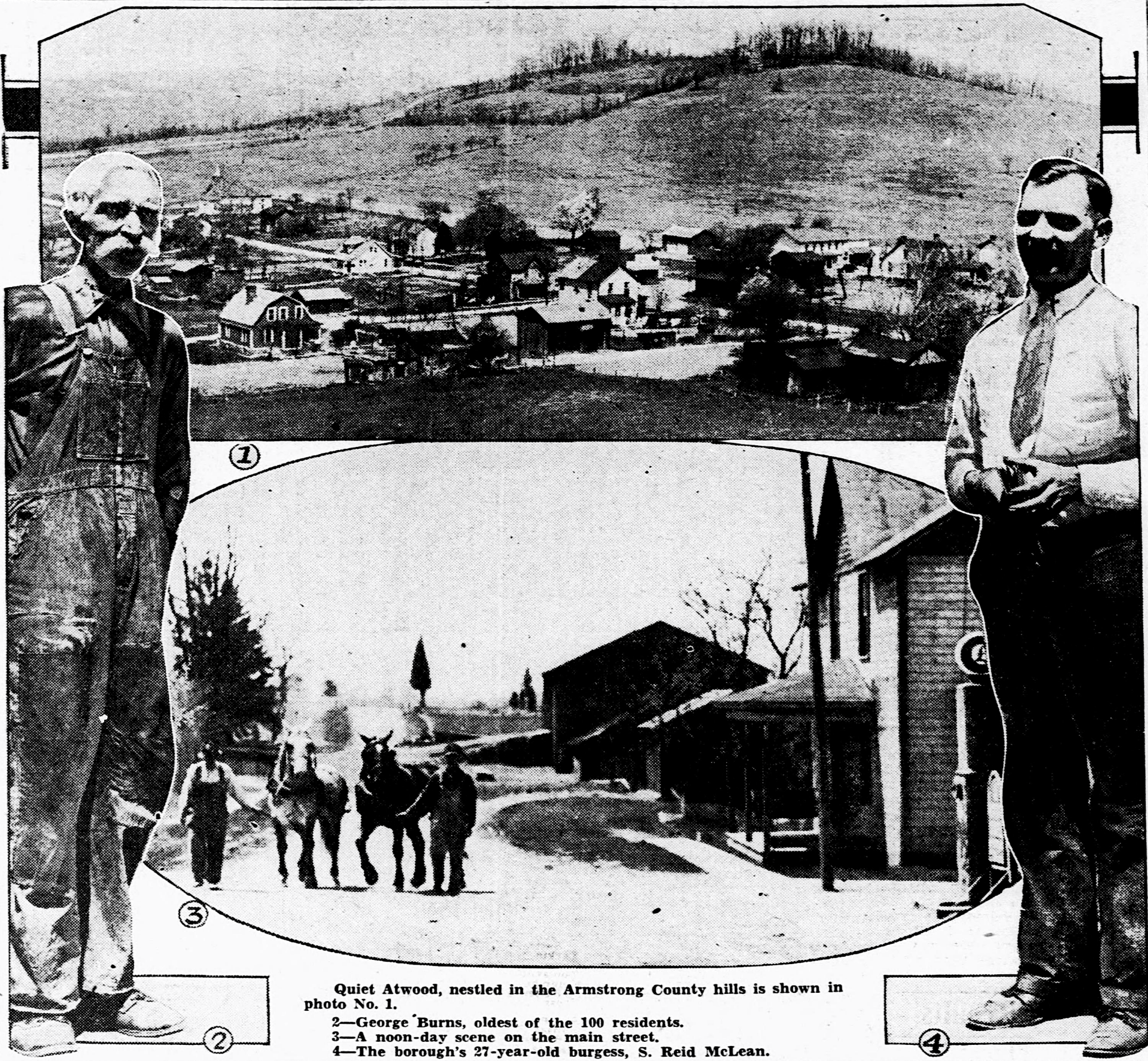
The borough treasurer and tax collector are the only two officials who draw a salary from Atwood's \$768 yearly tax receipts. The school, with 20 students and four to be sent to Sagamore High School, is operated on \$1,200 a year. The borough tax rate is five mills.

Atwood's population has decreased from several hundred in its boom-day to a bare hundred today. There are now about 40 homes in the town.

Began at Crossroads

"Allison's Crossroads was the beginning of Atwood around 1868," Squire McLean explains. "J. W. Marshall, one of the pioneer residents, came from Dayton, Pa., and opened the first general store here. He also operated Atwood's only hotel, the Travelers' Home.

"The advantage of being on the



Quiet Atwood, nestled in the Armstrong County hills is shown in photo No. 1.

2—George Burns, oldest of the 100 residents.

3—A noon-day scene on the main street.

4—The borough's 27-year-old burgess, S. Reid McLean.

main road between Kittanning and Indiana brought a postoffice here about that time. Other business men in the section began operating stores here at the same time.

"The borough was incorporated in the neighborhood of 1880. John Gibson was elected the first burgess. Dr. J. W. Morrow, the only physician we've ever had, put his shingle out then.

"Dr. Morrow also conducted a summer school here for many years. It was attended by prominent doctors and lawyers from all over this section of the state.

'Bunko' Artists Caught

"About 40 years ago," Squire McLean continues, "two 'bunko change artists' stopped in Atwood. They managed to 'rook' my dad and some other business men out of about \$50.

"I grabbed a 32 and a 38 caliber revolver and hopped onto a horse when the merchants discovered they had been tricked. I caught up to the men in Plumville, five miles away, stuck the guns on them and made them give back the dough. This was the nearest thing to a highway robbery we've ever had in Atwood."

The borough of Atwood today is just a little farm community. Its residents worship at either of the two little Presbyterian Churches there and live their lives on serenity away from the traveled highway.

Atwood's present and future is written in the mud of its streets and its past is chiseled on the stone markers of its iron-fenced little cemetery at the end of the town.