

From Humble Start, Rural Valley Marks 150th Year



The house formerly lived in by Dr. G. L. Stewart is shown at left. His daughter, Maxine, now lives there. At center is the Methodist Church parsonage, then the church itself, built by Dr. William Aitkens, Rural Valley's first physician.



Main Street West in Rural Valley is shown in this old postcard, courtesy of Mrs. Frances B. Calarie. She also supplied the other scene of Rural Valley at left as well as the photo of the St. James Hotel. The town marks its Sesquicentennial this weekend.

By ERMA DOVENSPIKE
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RURAL VALLEY — Although founded in 1830, the town of Rural Valley didn't become a borough until 1900. But 1830 is considered the date of its founding, as the northeastern Armstrong County settlement marks its Sesquicentennial, its 150th year, today and Sunday.

In the early years, the town was a trading post for the area and was known as "Rural Village."

Some years prior to 1830, John Patterson settled in the west-central portion of Cowanshannock Township, which takes its name from the beautiful little stream that coursed through the center of the area. Soon after the settling of this

section, Patterson gave the name "Rural Valley" to his homestead, no doubt being impressed with the unusual beauty of the area.

In 1830, a post office was established at the Patterson home with Patterson serving as postmaster. Some five years after the establishment of the post office, Ebenezer Cross erected a grist mill in the new village. The next year, 1836, Patterson laid out the old plot of Rural Valley. In this plot there were 20 lots on each side of the old turnpike that extended east from Cemetery Avenue to Washington Avenue.

In the ensuing three years, a village with a school, Presbyterian church, store, post office and tavern was established.

In the autumn of 1839, a new plot of building lots was laid out for the rapidly growing village. Alexander Foster, a pioneer settler of Rural Valley, and his son of the same name were the promoters of this project, which extended west from Cemetery Avenue to Water Street.

In 1876, the Methodist Church (founded in 1851) had been organized, and a road from Kittanning to Clearfield, part of which followed the main street of the village, had been built. Four merchants, a mason, a physician, a tinsmith, a peddler, a printer, five blacksmiths, two carpenters, a justice of the peace, three wagon makers, two shoemakers, a tailor, an artist and two innkeepers served the needs of the 197 people in the village and others from the surrounding community.

In 1900, when the coal mines were opened in Cowanshannock Township, the Kroh Plan of lots opened the west end of the borough and spurred the growth of the town.

The year 1901 marked the organization of the Lutheran Church.

During the following years, a bank, a flour mill, a lumber mill, a dairy, a newspaper, The Rural Valley Advance, garages and stores were added to the borough. The telephone company, gas street lights, a water system, fire protection and, in 1924, electricity contributed to the well-being of the people. When Route 85 was paved in

1924, transportation from Rural Valley to other areas was greatly improved.

In the interim, between the first log cabin school and the present Shannock Valley school complex, three other school buildings had been erected, which was indicative of the people's continued interest in their children's education.

The 1960 census shows 411 houses and a population of 1,028 in Rural Valley Borough. It is a growing residential community of well-cared-for homes, which include 22 well-preserved houses that are more than 100 years old. Several contain logs from the original buildings built by early settlers.

Saturday Headliner

Cars Killed Need For Overnight Stays Valley Hotel Boom Finally Went Bust

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RURAL VALLEY — Following the opening of the coal mine at Yatesboro in 1900, a "boom" struck Rural Valley and the demand for increased hotel accommodations became a must as the two established inns,

Gourley Inn (Hotel) and Kirkpatrick Inn (Hotel) could not handle the influx of new patrons.

A veteran hotel man, John L. Cain, met the demand. He purchased the old John W. Stoops farmhouse at the corner of Main Street and Gourley Avenue. The building holds some historical reference. As early as 1832, Stoops purchased land from Alexander Foster Sr. and built his brick farmhouse. In all probability, the bricks were baked in a kiln at the location (for example, the Atkins-Totten brick house was built a few years later, and the bricks were made in the vicinity). The Stoops home became a place of worship for Methodists until their meeting house was erected.

Cain remodeled the building from cellar to attic and converted it into one of the cosiest and most convenient inns to be found anywhere. The entire house was newly furnished, while the table was laden with all the delicacies, luxuries and substantial of the season.

In 1902, John P. Martin became the proprietor with John L. Cain the owner. Rates were \$1 per day. The dining room had been enlarged to seat 50 people. In July of the same year, Cain traded the St. James Hotel to Ralph Stone of Eagleville, Ohio, for 200 acres of land on Stone's stock farm. Martin remained as proprietor.

In August of 1902, Stoops spent several days visiting in his home town and noted many changes. His former home had become the St. James Hotel — substantially enlarged — and across the street where the barn had stood, A. J. Caylor & Co. had a store.

On April 1, 1903, a gentleman named Newton bought out Martin and applied for a new license. In the same month, Newton disposed of his interest to a John J. Conrad of Big Run.

Two robberies took place while Conrad was proprietor, one thief taking \$300. In September, the license was transferred from Conrad to William Hall. Hall had been employed at the hotel for two years and had the experience to conduct the business.

Sewer lines were laid to a ravine west of the hotel in July, 1903.

The Knights of Pythias Lodge had a banquet and general social at the hotel. The knights and their ladies were pleased with the supper served by "Mine Host Hall." Speeches followed the meal, and dancing was enjoyed later.

The Odd Fellows held their banquet there. About 100 people attended and pronounced it a first-class meeting place.

James Curren Sr. and Doris Curren of Kittanning purchased the hotel in April, 1906. A band stand was

erected where the Rural Valley and Yatesboro bands could perform. Many festivals were held on the front lawn. An advertisement proclaimed the hotel the "St. James Hotel, Rural Valley, First Class Accommodations for MAN or BEAST."

E. R. Jones was the proprietor in 1909. The Rural Valley Advance of May 31, 1909, announced the death of Jones. The same year James Curren Sr., a former owner, died from injuries received when hit by a train.

H. S. Smeltzer became proprietor of the hotel in 1910. The rates at that time had risen to \$2 per day, \$5 per week and a bed for 50 cents.

Valentine Koffler took over the hotel in 1911. The barn was torn down to make way for a new barroom.

In 1915, William Broad purchased the hotel, naming it the "Broad Hotel" after himself. He did extensive remodeling.

Broad was active during the war years, and he organized the Buck Shot Brigade in 1918.

In December, 1920, Samuel E. Johnston re-opened the hotel. Being a Prohibition year, he used the barroom for storage, including feed for horses and pigs. The Rural Valley American Legion organized its post and held its meetings at the hotel.

"Doc" Crawford became the new proprietor in December, 1924. The building had been purchased by the Rural Valley Mutual Fire Insurance Co. Six additional bedrooms were added, making 21 rooms available. At one time 70 guests had been turned away due to lack of space.

When automobiles and good roads came, the hotel business dropped. This occurred in the early 1930s. The property was sold at a sheriff's sale for taxes, costs and attorney fees. B. E. Stear became the new owner in 1933. The rooms were turned into apartments. Many newlyweds took up housekeeping in the apartments.

The west side of the first floor was rented to dentists and doctors, namely Harold Shaffer, DDS; Joseph Campisano, DDS; Raymond Butler, M.D.; Dorsey Hoyt, M.D.; and Charles Steim, M.D.

Mrs. Violet Hutchison opened a beauty shop and had living quarters on the first floor east, and later Grace Fair opened a beauty shop in the same quarters.

In the summer of 1938, the outside of the building was given a fresh coat of paint, but the name "Broad Hotel" that adorned the second-story front was not disturbed and remained until Mrs. Eva Dean, present owner of the property, had the building demolished in 1977. All that remains are the cement walks and the pitcher pump.



The St. James Hotel went through many changes during its years in Rural Valley...



...from new ownerships to new names, such as the Brood Hotel, its name in 1912...



...to its becoming a set of apartments before its eventual demolition in 1977.