

HISTORY OF RICHWOOD

From the 1938 Spud and Splinter Festival Program August 25-27, 1938 (2nd Annual Homecoming)

Richwood, originally Rich Woods, is a name derived from the rich loamy appearance of the soil in the surrounding forest region and was first applied to the section between Cranberry, cherry and Gauley Rivers, now known as Hinkle mountain. The first post office and voting place of this name was about five miles from the present City of Richwood.

The lands of the region from the timber of which fortunes have since been made in Richwood's mills and factories, except the small parcels occupied by the thinly scattered settlers, were practically abandoned by the early owners and frequently sold for taxes. Then coming into the hands of the late United States Senator, Allen T. Caperton, were sold by his trustees, after his death, at eighty cents per acre, purchased by the U.S. Senator J. M. Camden.

The county was ever famous for its trout, deer, and bear and was early visited by persons noted for hunting and fishing. The "Fishing Rock" at the Western limits of the City marks the favorite "fishing hole" of the late Senator John F. Kenna.

The only means of access was the Greenbrier Road passing from Craigsville through the "Rich Woods" to Lewisburg and the Pocahontas trail which was constructed before the Civil war and traveled by small detachments of both armies in the days of that unhappy conflict.

The first settlers of the section were mainly the families of the Mullens, Hinkles and Spencers. The original settler where Richwood now stands was Allen Spencer and when the Cherry River Boom and Lumber Company came in 1900 those living in the present City limits were James A. Spencer, Charles Spencer, B.B. Spencer, George Spencer, M.M. Copeland, John Webb and E.C. Cook and their families. There was a little grist mill near where N.E. Parker now lives and a small store started the year before by Cam Griggs. The Spencers, according to their customs, had a number of black bears in pens and James Hanna had a "Deer Park" six miles out on the hills, where Arthur Hinkle now lives, full of the native Virginia deer.

The Census of 1900 showed a population of twenty-four souls. This had increased in 1910 to 3,061 and in 1920 to 4,331 and in 1930 to 6,947 since rising to over 7,600.

The Cherry River Boom and Lumber Company and the Dodge Clothespin Company, now the Steele Wallace Corp, both began operation in 1901. The Cherry Tanning Company came in 1902 and the Cherry River Paper Company in 1904.

Richwood Banking and Trust Company opened its doors for business November 22nd, 1912; the First National Bank opened for business November 13th, 1906, and the citizens Bank July 10, 1916.

The first hotel was the Taylor House, now the Yew Pine Inn, followed soon afterwards by the Northern and the Central. Both the Northern and Central hotels were destroyed by the disastrous fire of 1928. The Northern was rebuilt and the Oakford Hotel followed.

The first church in Richwood was the Presbyterian, built on the present location in 1901, then the M.E. Church on the present site at the corner of Oakford Avenue and Walnut Street, built in 1902, remodeled about 1908 and destroyed by the big fire of August 15th, 1921 which wiped out about 30 buildings in the

best section of the city on Main Street, Walnut Street and Oakford Avenue. The Baptists erected their original church building in 1903 and the M.E. Church, South, put up its building in 1904 and 1905. The Catholics built their church in 1905.

The McClung Hospital founded by Dr. James McClung, opened for business August 1st, 1905 and the Sacred Heart Hospital, erected by the Pallatine Sisters of the Catholic Church, was built November 7th, 1913 and enlarged in 1921.

The Board of Education of Beaver District failed and refused to make ample provision for schools in the new town, so, under the leadership of Albert Dodge, who proposed the Bill, the Legislature passed an Act, February 21, 1902, creating the Independent School District of Richwood, which was ratified by the voters at a special election held a few weeks thereafter. But Beaver District Board refused to canvas the returns and declare the results until compelled by mandamus proceedings, confirmed by the Supreme Court. The decision of the upper Court was so long delayed that when the time came to canvas the returns, rats had gotten into the drawer where the election records and certificates were kept and completely destroyed them. The results were nevertheless declared.

In the meantime to help matters along the Town Council of the Town of Richwood had passed and the people ratified at the polls an eight percent bond issue, long ago paid, the proceeds of which were used in constructing the Walnut Street school building at the northeast corner of Walnut and Virginia streets in 1903. The new brick high school building on the north bank of the Cherry River was erected in 1916 and the gymnasium and new buildings for the grades in South Richwood and the Greenbrier Road in 1920 and 1921, the money for these buildings being raised by bond issues. The Catholics opened their parochial school in 1909.

This same Albert Dodge in 1930 organized the Richwood Cemetery Association to provide a place for the burial of the dead.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was completed to Richwood in 1901 and the town laid out by the Cherry River Boom and Lumber Company under its superintendent, B. Gilpin Smith, shot up like a mushroom. Lots which then sold for \$150 each have since changed hands at as much as \$10,000 for the naked lot. A great deal of credit is due to the said Smith for the large scale on which the town was laid out. The real founder of Richwood was J.W. Oakford of Scranton, PA for whom Oakford Avenue, the former Oakford Theatre, and the Oakford Lodge I.O.O.F are named. With prophetic vision he saw the opportunity and with determination to succeed in spite of limited resources, organized and financed Cherry River Boom and Lumber Company, the nucleus around which everything else was built.

In spite of our large and rapid growth the county court of Nicholas County refused to give a voting place in Richwood until 1904 and in 1902, although the town then contained over one thousand population, those who were patriotic enough to make the sacrifice, traveled five miles out to the Hinkle school house in order to have the privilege of casting ballots. We now have five voting places in the city

The Town of Richwood was incorporated by the Circuit by the Circuit Court of Nicholas County November 13th, 1901. An Act creating the City of Richwood was passed by the Legislature of West Virginia March 31, 1921 and made effective from passage. The mayors of Richwood in order of their service have been E.E. Deitz, two terms; D.D. Dix, L.C. Williams, J.E. Kessler, Johnson Alderson, two terms; E.C. Bennette, three terms; S.C. Dotson, Edgar Sparks (four months); J.B. Jones (eight months);

G.W. Shawver, A.L. Craig, one term; W.D. McClung, two terms; H.E. Dillinger ,two terms; J.M. Wolverton, George E. Hurd, two terms; Dr. I.H. Dobbins, two terms; Frank Stone, three terms; E.E. Deitz and the present mayor, Dr. E. C. Bennette.

The first pavement was laid in Richwood on Main Street in 1912. South Oakford Avenue was paved in 1913 and 1914. North Oakford Avenue in 1916, East and West Main Street and River Side Drive from the Greenbrier road intersection to Boggs Avenue in 1921. The new brick City Building was erected in 1915 and the concrete bridge over Cherry River at the south end of Oakford Avenue in 1922.

Business has been good in Richwood from the beginning and the people have always enjoyed an unusual portion of prosperity.

During the week of August 23, 1937, the first Homecoming Spud and Splinter Festival was inaugurated. The Four Hundred Admirals of the Cherry River Navy joined with a visiting crowd of five thousand and witnessed the christening and maiden voyage of the flagship "Clothespin."

Thus Richwood's unique "inland Navy" caught securely the popular fancy of all West Virginia, and through newspaper channels, that of the United States. So was wrought the background for this, the Second Annual Homecoming Spud and Splinter Festival.

Factors which for years have made Richwood isolated are now turning to make it the center for a vast undeveloped area. Coal underlies the whole Gauley basin, and changing demands of the times indicate interest in Richwood for location of wood products and possible coal by products industries.

The present need of the State, as well as this section is completion of the "Missing Link" between here and Marlinton through intersection with the Seneca Trail at Mill point.