

CHAPTER XI

Radford – Situation of the town – Formerly known as Central – Original owners of the soil – Inception of the place – Its gradual growth until construction of the New River Railroad – Incorporation of the place as Central in 1887 – Purchase of the Wharton and Radford farms by the Radford Land and Improvement Company – West Radford – Development of the same – Its enterprises and industries – The Radford Development Company – Growth of East Radford – Spirit between East and West Radford – Resources of the town – Its financial status – Its population, schools, churches, and hotels – Improvement and growth of the place – The Radford "Enterprise" – Future of the town as an iron centre.

RADFORD, one of the coming cities of Southwest Virginia, is situated on New River, in Montgomery County, 301 miles from Norfolk, and about 100 miles from Bristol, Tenn., the western terminus of the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company. With reference to the Pocahontas Flat Top coal region, it is most happily situated, since it is at the junction of the New River division of the Norfolk and Western with the main line of the latter. This fact, and the further statement that New River is some 500 feet wide at this point, and amply sufficient for water power, gives the place a prominence at once in the eyes of any one at all acquainted with the topography of the country. Its proximity to the coking fields at Pocahontas and ore region of the Cripple Creek – New River mineral territory is pregnant with significance as to the future of the place. Some inquiry into its past is by no means uninteresting.

The place known as Radford now was at one time called Central. Long before the civil war, and sufficiently far back for the purposes of this sketch as to the original ownership of the soil, it appears that it was owned by John McCandless Taylor, Colonel Hamet, and the Ingles family, the latter of whom were descendants of Mary Ingles, who figured so conspicuously in frontier warfare with the Indians, as we have already seen. John McCandless Taylor's daughter, Elizabeth, married Dr. John B. Radford, and in the year 1840 the former gave the latter a thousand acres, situated on both sides of the river, which property was given by Dr. Radford to Mrs. General G.C. Wharton, the charming and cultured Mrs. Adams, and his son, J. Lawrence Radford – all of whom reside at Radford, except Mrs. General Wharton, who is dead. Colonel Hamet's property passed into the hands of Stockton Heth and his wife, the latter of whom was the daughter of Colonel Hamet. The Ingles property descended to Captain William Ingles, now living at Radford, also. Most of this land, as we shall see later on, passed into the hands of the development companies now located at this place.

This point being equidistant between Lynchburg and Bristol, in 1856 the Virginia and Tennessee railroad concluded to have machine shops started here. At that time the place was a mere railway station, with three railroad companies' tenement houses, a temporary hotel, and store-house, with some half a dozen families. On the 15th day of October, 1856, W.B. Ransom, now a resident of New River, landed there with engines, tools, and machinery, and four apprentice boys, with a journeyman, for the purpose of opening a shop for the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad Company. On the 10th of December, 1856, the machine shops started under the supervision of Samuel Peters, master mechanic at Lynchburg, with W.B. Ransom as foreman. In 1858 the latter was made master mechanic, with charge of the Virginia and Tennessee railroad. In 1860, at the commencement of the civil war, there were some twenty families in the place, composed principally of railroad men. The town did not progress at all during the civil war which raged, and the railroad did little except to transport troops over its line; so Central came out of the struggle in a rather dilapidated condition. At the close of the civil war the road was soon gotten into a condition to pass the trains over, and Central began to revive and build up slowly. At this time the town of New River, across the river at Radford, had four houses and a saw mill, and the property was purchased by General G.C. Wharton. Subsequently the General

was elected to the Virginia Legislature, and while there obtained a charter incorporating the New River Railroad, Mining, and Manufacturing Company, in 1872 – a history of which we have already given. The inception of this regenerating scheme for Southwest Virginia was, as we have seen, due to General Wharton, and many subsequent acts of his to aid and assist it place the people in this section in his debt for conception, birth, and construction of the New River railroad, which regenerated Central and was the beginning of the wonderful development of the Southwest. There is nothing which he might reasonably demand of the people that should not be acceded to by them with gratitude.

Upon completion of the New River railroad and commencement of the coal traffic in 1882 and 1883, Central began to improve, and in 1887 the place was incorporated, with a population of five hundred or more. In this same year the Radford Land and Improvement Company purchased 585 acres of land from General and Mrs. Wharton, and 970 acres from J. Lawrence Radford. The organization of this company and the purchase of this property was the beginning of the west portion of the town called West Radford. From this period on industries, such as the stove foundry, brick-works, and plant for an iron furnace, came in, and the place grew rapidly and increased in population until in 1890 there were about 3,000 people in both East and West Radford.

The policy of the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company of making frequent divisional stops for the purpose of building towns was one of the reasons of Radford's former growth. The construction and operation of the machine-shops and round-house at this point gave a decided impetus to the place. The shops consist of a brick building 200x50, with an annex for the smith's department of 40x60. Eighty-five hands are employed regularly in the shops proper, with twenty on the car-repairing and inspecting force. There is a round-house with twenty-four stalls, and the crews running the trains for both passenger and freight traffic here. The result is, most of these workmen have homes, while part of the money made by the train employees is spent in this place. The office of division superintendent for the Western division of the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company is located here, with its employees and clerks. The pay-roll for the shops, offices, and yard force amounts to some \$7,000 per month. The situation of this shop here has been very material in advancing the growth of the town.

Subsequently to 1887, the Radford Land and Improvement Company began their operations, other joint-stock land corporations were formed, which were as follows: The West End Land Company, the West Radford Land Company, the River View Company, South Radford Land Company, and the Radford Development Company. These companies, with an authorized capital stock of \$1,915,000, purchased lands from William Ingles (property northwest of Radford, over the river – land belonging to Stockton Heth and wife), and a liberal subscription to undertakings and plants located there, many valuable industries were brought in, which gave the place a material move forward.

Some very important manufacturing plants were secured, among which may be mentioned the Radford Brick Works, East Radford Brick Works, the Townsend and Hooper Manufacturing Company, the Radford Stove and Range Company, the Crane Iron Works and Furnace, sash, door, and blind factory, knitting company, dwelling-house company, Radford Lumber Company, and the trust company. Of the industries we have named many were in operation, some under construction, but all secured. The majority of them are situated in West Radford, the rest in East Radford and New River, across the river.

The natural result of all these industries pouring in between 1887 and 1890 was the place became a business town, and began to be spoken of abroad as one of the coming cities of Southwest Virginia. The erection of the cozy, commodious inn by the land company and the lovely new passenger station by the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company added materially to both the comfort and beauty of the town. Where in 1887 we saw only fields rich with cereals and grass, we now see a town with broad,

well-graded avenues; huge industries, either in operation or in course of construction; rows of beautiful residences and cottages, and the imposing Radford Inn, the trust company's offices, and other attractive buildings. This is West Radford of 1890.

Nor is the east portion of the place (formerly Central) behind in this spirit of forward movement which has characterized the west portion of the town. The organization of the Radford Development Company by Lieutenant-Governor J. Hoge Tyler was a new era to the place which had grown so slowly as Central. This concern was formed on the 25th day of March, 1890, with a capital stock of \$200,000, and purchased three hundred and eighteen acres of land from Stockton Heth and wife, one-third of which was laid off into lots and broad, long streets, properly graded. This property lies north of the town, directly upon the railroad, and east of that part of the place; located upon the eminence south or the railroad. The situation of this part of the company's property on the eminence is beautifully located for residence purposes, while the portion lying between the railroad and river is admirably situated for business houses and manufacturing sites. In order to fully appreciate the east portion of Radford it is necessary to go on the hill, or rather east gentle acclivity, around Captain Heth's lovely residence, and then the residence part bursts into view, adjoining which lies the lands of this company to the east. One of the improvements inaugurated by the company was the construction of "La Belle Inn," which lies easy of the beautiful grove surrounding Captain Heth's. Lots and sites are donated by this concern for all manufacturing purposes, and it is thought by some that the railroad will consume a part for extension of their yard and shops.

In addition to the railroad shops in this portion of Radford, there are several other enterprises, such as brick works, wood and lumber manufacturing concerns, and a substantial banking and commercial business, supported not only by the people of the place, but by others from the surrounding country. Much of the trade which used to go to Christiansburg, the county seat of Montgomery, now comes to this town, owing to the fact that its rapid development and influx of manufactories have created a demand, and supply invariably follows the former. Radford is now taking much of the trade of Montgomery and Pulaski, which was not so formerly, and a further inquiry has developed the fact that it is making inroads into Giles County, west of the place

Considering that East and West Radford are but one place and that there is a unity of interest between the two, there should be complete harmony and a purpose of determination to advance the interests of each as if they were a whole. But such is not the case. Each place seems to possess a desire to help and assist the other no farther than their individual welfare requires. Necessarily such conduct injures Radford as a town, and this kind of spirit cannot be too strongly decried nor severely condemned. With all the advantages, both natural and artificial, which the city possesses, it does seem wrong for any one part to hold back on account of another when all is at stake. Both have the same unexcelled agricultural and mineral resources, which, after all, are the substance of every town's growth in this section, and each could advance and assist the material prosperity of the other without injuring or affecting its own.

When we come to speak of the resources of the place we more or less give an insight into its advantages, with which we know of but few places that compare so favorably. In the first place, its situation seems to have been formed by nature for the purposes of making it an iron centre. It is peculiarly fortunate in having unusually fine railway facilities. Located on the great thoroughfare east and west, it has the certain probability of an outlet northwest by way of the extension from Ivanhoe into North Carolina, to connect with the Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railroad. It has almost unlimited waterpower running at its borders, and that is a material item in the make-up of a city. Its surrounding country is one of the finest agricultural regions in this whole section, having on the east the grain-growing counties of Montgomery, Roanoke, and Botetourt, while on the west it possesses the splendid grazing and stock-raising country noted throughout the whole state for its

productiveness. By reason of its lying on New River, which flows from North Carolina in a northwesterly direction into the Ohio at Point Pleasant, and its railroad communications, it is the natural outlet for all the agricultural and grass productions of the rich Southwest. Its immediate surrounding country is extremely rich in all the natural fruits of the soil; and although it lies on an elevated plateau, the land possesses all the fertility and beauty that is seen in the rich valleys of Pennsylvania and Maryland. As a place of residence it has no superior, because, being elevated some 1,800 feet above the sea, it is free from all malaria, and possesses an atmosphere at once pleasant and invigorating.

When we turn to mineral resources, this place occupies a preeminent position above everyone that we know of, if we except Pulaski City. As we have stated before, it is situated at the junction of the main line of the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company with the New River division of the same. This latter branch leads directly to the great coal and coking fields of the Flat Top region, some seventy miles off. The value of this coke for blast furnaces manufacturing pig-iron has already been alluded to, and virtually the material in this part of iron making may be said to be at Radford's doors. Only a few hours run places coke of the best quality and in unlimited quantities at its furnaces, giving that city a rate as to freight which others farther off cannot hope for except through railroad manipulation, which is now a violation of law. In respect to ores the town is equally as fortunate. Only twenty-five miles away are the celebrated New River-Cripple Creek regions, containing large quantities of the best iron ore, which can be reached now by rail. The quantity and character of this ore have been referred to already in a former chapter, and a full analysis given. But Radford may, and has it in its power to come nearer still to the ore section than at present. At the last session of the Legislature, Mr. J. Lawrence Radford, the representative from Montgomery County, obtained a charter incorporating the Radford and Little River Railroad, which in time is obliged to be constructed, and when it is, the ore fields of Carroll and Floyd will be but a matter of eighteen miles away. The construction of furnaces for reduction of the raw material will cause the Radford and Little River Railroad to be built. So the natural position of the place is that of Pittsburgh and other iron centres – a junction of the ore and coking regions.

The financial condition of Radford has a fair showing, and gives evidence of the capital invested in the place since 1887. Inasmuch as the land companies own a greater part of the real estate, this property is classed with the amount represented by them. While there may be some slight variation from the statement we give, in the main it will be found to be a fair epitome of the value in the place:

Value of property owned by the land companies, & real estate	\$1,950,000
Amount of capital invested in other enterprises	\$2,250,000
Value of personal property	\$486,200
Total	\$4,686,200

This estimate includes everything in the nature of property, real and perishable. The values may seem large on the first blush; but it must be remembered that Radford, as delineated by us, extends from East Radford to New River town across the river, including that. The amounts, upon investigation, will be found to be a fair representation as of the year 1890.

The population of the place has increased greatly since 1887. At that time there were some five hundred people, and the town was slowly progressing, but now it is claimed by the people of the place to be four thousand. From an investigation on this score we are safe in saying that in January, 1891, the town had about 3,700 people – may be a fraction over. The last census did not show so many, but since that was taken there has been a considerable increase. The inhabitants as a whole are good and clever people, and, considering that the place is new, there is an absence of those rough, quasi criminal characters which usually infest a town just beginning to grow. A great many of

the descendants of the original people of this Southwest section are there, among whom may be mentioned General G.C. Wharton and family, Captain R.H. Adams and wife (nee Radford), J. Lawrence Radford, the Goodwyns, Kearsleys, Barclays, Crockets, Ingleses, Heths, Tylers, Hoges, and some others, all of whom compose a social status extremely pleasant. In New River (the upper part of the town) live some persons who have been at the place for many years and know each and every step of its progress. Educational facilities in the town are good, and there has been an increase in the attendance of scholars since the town was incorporated. There are two schools in the place, one of which is known as the "Belle Heth Academy," which is in East Radford, and a fine building in West Radford. These schools are under the charge and control of Professor Gunn, who has an able corps of assistants, and the grade of scholarship is fair.

The usual attendance of scholars number up to about five hundred. Christian privileges are ample and sufficient in every way, there being Methodist, Missionary Baptist, Christian Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Northern Methodist churches in the place, and divine worship is held in each one respectively every other or every Sabbath day. The pastors are men of both high moral character and theological culture. In West Radford a lot has been donated, and an Episcopal church will be erected, not far from where the present rector (Mr. Robert Goodwyn) resides with his charming and cultured family. In addition to school facilities and religious privileges the stranger can always find in Radford pleasant hostelries in which to enjoy the comforts and luxuries of life. The Radford Inn, in the west part of the town, is one of a number of hotels managed by Fred E. Foster, and its service and menu is good. Several others are in East Radford, among which may be mentioned, in addition "La Belle Inn," the Commercial and Hoffman houses, both comfortable places.

In many places the growth of a town into 3,000 or 4,000 people in three years would be considered quite rapid, but in Southwest Virginia it is what is termed a sound, healthy progression. Radford has never been advertised to any considerable extent until the latter part of the year 1890, yet its improvements resulting from natural advantages have been marked. Three years ago Captain Barclay, of Kearsley, Barclay and Crocket, a real estate firm in the place, and a gentleman originally from Lexington, walked through the mud from East Radford to West Radford to sell the lots laid off by the Radford Land and Improvement Company. He was a pioneer real estate agent there, and then there were neither houses, streets, nor sidewalks, and no bridge was in existence to connect the two places. Now a well-graded street, with sidewalks, can be seen, and substantial residences, business-houses, and manufacturing enterprises greet the eye on every side. And so it is with East Radford, where the development company's property is situated, which has done so much in every way for the growth of the city. The improvement in every way has been a marked one, extending even across the river as far as the property known as "Brooklyn Heights," a beautiful site for resident purposes, and which belongs to A. Robinson, of West Radford, one of the leading real estate men in the place. Among the improvements in Radford, and one which has done its part in the development of Southwest Virginia, is the Radford Enterprise, published by Wardle and McGregor. It has always been a beautiful sheet, and well edited in every sense. The special issue prepared by them in October, 1890, was a monument to their taste, energy, and mechanical genius, and its portrayal of the advantages and resources of Southwest Virginia should enlist the gratitude of the people and insure the paper a handsome support. In the selection of all material there is a perfect freedom from all bad taste and double entendre which sets an example that other journals in this section might well follow.

The future of this place, so far as we can see, is undoubtedly a bright one. With its natural situation and water-power, its position with reference to the coal and coking regions, its rich surrounding agricultural country, its climate and health, its manufacturing and commercial interests, its upright and honest class of people, Radford is sure to be one of the coming cities of Southwest Virginia, and an iron centre of no small magnitude.