

CHAPTER XIII

Wythe County – Max Meadows – Wytheville – Crockett and Rural Retreat – Washington County – Glade Springs – Saltville – Future of the cities and towns of Southwest Virginia.

Leaving Pulaski City, in going westward we soon come into Wythe County, whose name is synonymous with agricultural resources and mineral wealth. This country plays an important part in the make-up of the New River – Cripple Creek mineral region, as we have seen, and is noted for the fine stock raised within its borders. Some of its lands have been long celebrated for their productiveness, while years ago iron was made from its charcoal furnaces, and lead manufactured at Austinville. We know of no country which has a finer mineral territory, and why its towns have played so small a part in the recent development we cannot imagine for a moment. But this section is fast progressing now, and the day is not far distant when Wytheville will redeem itself for past errors in this respect and take its proper place as the county-seat of one of the wealthiest counties on Southwest Virginia.

Max Meadows a year or two ago was a station on the Norfolk and Western Railroad, at which point iron from the furnaces on the Cripple Creek region was hauled in wagons for a distance of ten miles. Capitalists, recognizing the vast mineral deposits near this place, purchased these ore banks and, forming a land company, bought the ground around the station, and now it has become quite a village, with every mark of improvement. A large furnace is in course of construction, built by the "Max Meadows Iron Company," with a capacity of one hundred and thirty-five tons per diem. This furnace draws its ores from lands of the company, some four miles away, or less. The company also constructed a handsome inn, which is now open to the public, and is a model of elegance and comfort. This place, for many reasons, has a future before it, two of which we need only mention – its natural advantages in reference to climate and agricultural resources, and the further fact that it is supported by the Virginia Development Company. The capital stock of the Max Meadows Iron Company is \$400,000, and the shares owned by the Virginia Development Company in this amount to \$75,000. In the Max Meadows Land and Improvement Company it owns \$75,000 of its stock, and practically controls it. These facts lead us to naturally suppose that the place which in the last few months has developed so rapidly will grow into a town, or perhaps a city – who knows? The position of Max Meadows is a central one for its supply of coke and ores, as well as for the shipment of manufactured products to the northern and northwestern and eastern markets. The section around is one of the finest live-stock countries we know, and Fort Chiswell stock farm is but a short distance off. Throughout this whole productive country there will be a home demand in a few years for the supplies raised which will place the farming community upon a much sounder basis. Max Meadows is three hundred and twenty-nine miles from Bristol. Its development and improvement is mainly due to the efforts of the Virginia Development Company, which is playing such an important part in the progress of the extreme Southwest that at this point in our work it deserves some notice.

On October 1, 1887, the Virginia Steel Company was organized under a broad and liberal charter of the Legislature of Virginia, and until 1889 confined itself to operations of the company by building blast furnaces, rolling mills, foundries, and other enterprises, and to develop in particular the resources of Southwest Virginia and Shenandoah Valley, the company increased its capital stock from \$100,000 to \$5,000,000, and the name was changed to that of the Virginia Development Company, with the following officers" President, Richard S. Brock; First Vice President and Treasurer, Clarence M. Clark; Second Vice President, S.E. Chauvenet; Secretary, E.J. Collins. This company has a cumulative, full-paid, preferred stock of \$1,000,000 and \$4,000,000 of common stock, 20 per cent of which is paid with provisions that not more than 215 per cent can be called in any one calendar year. By liberal subscriptions on the part of this company industries and enterprises, by way of furnaces, land

improvement companies, and other operations, have been put on foot and brought to completion in Radford, Max Meadows, Graham, Salem, and Pocahontas, in Southwest Virginia, giving an almost invaluable assistance to this section in developing its resources and utilizing them. Mr. Edmund C. Pechin, whom we have quoted frequently on the subject of ores, is general manager, and a gentleman eminently qualified to fill the onerous and important duties of this post. It has done more than any other joint-stock company that we know of for Southwest Virginia, and on that account is entitled to the thanks and gratitude of the people. As an engine of development it has struck telling blows, and wherever it touches progress comes as if by some magic hand. So we may well understand that when Max Meadows was centered upon as one of the points of investment for this company, it was but natural that it should make rapid strides materially.

Wytheville, the county-seat of Wythe, is situated on a beautiful plateau, slightly depressed, on the summit of the Alleghany Mountains, 133 miles west of Lynchburg and 71 miles east of Bristol, the western terminus of the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company. Owing to its position in a country of unexcelled productiveness and charming scenery, and with a climate that is almost perfect, this place for many years has been a noted summer resort for people from many other states in the Union, particularly the Southern States. The place is 2,300 feet above the level of the sea. There is always a refreshing breeze, which not only relieves depression and debility, but gives an invigorating, healthy buoyancy to the system so pleasant to wearied humanity. The climate compares favorably with that of Turin and Geneva, in Europe, as can be seen from the following comparative temperatures for some years:

	Spring/Summer	Autumn	Winter	Year
Turin 52.2	70.3	54.2	34.0	52.07
Geneva 53.7	71.5	53.8	33.5	53.1
Wytheville 52	70.6	53	32.3	53

The thermometer is rarely above ninety degrees in summer or below zero in winter, and in the warm months of July and August the evenings are delightful, and the nights so cool that a blanket becomes comfortable. This place is one of the oldest towns in Southwest Virginia, being over a century in years, and is very conservative in all its ideas and views. The place is one of the yearly circuits of the Court of Appeals of Virginia, which sits there every June for this section of Virginia. The town is well laid off, with broad streets, the main one being the old macadamized road which ran from Seven-mile Ford, in Smyth County, to Staunton, in Augusta County, Virginia. Standing at the upper end of Main Street and looking down through the place, a beautiful vista is presented between the sidewalks which becomes almost sublime when seen at night under the rays of the electric lights, which the town has the good fortune to possess. From the earliest years of this century Wytheville has been a trading centre from the counties adjoining Wythe, and from this source principally it drew a support, and a handsome one, too. The past days of covered wagons, loaded with produce of every description, coming in from the country to get their supplies, are still within the memory of some of the inhabitants of the place, who deem the railroads an invasion and regard the continued triumphs of science as a sign of the demoralization of these days in which we live.

Wytheville, owing to the demand of this trade of which we have just spoken, has always been something of a manufacturing place in order to supply them as far as profitable and practicable. A furniture establishment, carriage and wagon manufactory, a machine shop and foundry, a flouring mill, several cigar factories, a canning establishment, are in operation, all of which add materially to the welfare of the place. But no Wytheville is throwing off her lethargy and recognizing her vast agricultural and mineral resources, and is determined to take advantage of them. Capitalists are seizing hold of these; a development company has been organized, and new hotels are to be erected and a general improvement inaugurated. The construction of Jackson Park Hotel in the beautiful

woodland west of the place will result in the erection of a building which will eclipse any other we know of in the way of natural scenery and beauty of situation. There is no reason that can be possible assigned to show why this place should not become a great manufacturing centre and still retain its prestige as a summer resort and an educational point of celebrity.

Wytheville is certainly a seat of learning, if the number and good reputation of its schools constitute it. A great many institutions of learning are here, both male and female, among which may be mentioned Wytheville Male Academy, A.A. Campbell principal; Plummer Memorial Female College, Rev. S.R. Preston principal; Wytheville Seminary, Mrs. Thomas R. Drew principal. All of these schools are conducted upon the best possible educational principles, while moral and physical training are strictly attended to, and the comforts and pleasures of the students considered. These establishments have developed the minds of many a man and woman who have played no small part in the development of Southwest Virginia. Co-existing with these fine scholastic advantages are the best possible religious privileges, which have a material influence upon the place. The Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, Christian, Lutheran, and Baptist denominations are here, all of which have churches, and divine worship is held every Sabbath; and Sunday-schools are in a flourishing condition. These educational facilities and Christian observances have not only a salient effect upon the residents of the place, but impress the minds of the visitors, more or less. The result is a state of society which is admirable and charming in every way, and which gives the place the reputation of being the most elegant and refined one in this section of country. Amusements are plentiful, and the German club, organized by the young men of the place, and which meets once a week at each of the hotels, is a distinctive feature in the makeup of the pleasure of the town.

While Wytheville has grown slowly, there has been an increase all the time in its population, for in the year 1860 there were only fifteen hundred people in the place, while now there are three thousand; and with the many natural advantages it possesses in the way of agricultural resources and mineral wealth almost at its doors, it should continue to increase – only more rapidly – than it has done hitherto. It is surrounded with the best type of ores, and a soil on which nature has expended her utmost force to render it rich and productive. The United States fish hatchery is near this town, and is an object of no small amount of curiosity.

Passing westward from Wytheville some thirteen miles, we arrive at Rural Retreat, which is 2,500 feet above the level of the sea, being the most elevated place on the line of the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company. Near this place is Crockett, which has been, and is now, a shipping point for the iron manufactured at the charcoal furnaces nearby. Both this place and Rural Retreat are the centre of a section of country which is growing financially well off from the production and sale of cabbage. Large quantities of this succulent vegetable of the finest quality are produced and shipped South annually from these places. The cultivation of fruits, vegetables, poultry, and eggs is always a sign of prosperity among the farming community, and with a home demand, which they are fast gaining, to consume their supplies, they must necessarily become a rich and independent class.

Glade Springs is located in Washington County, one of the wealthiest and loveliest counties in Southwest Virginia. This thriving town, though small, has a future, and is the native heath of blooded horses shipped everywhere, and finely bred cattle. The place takes its name from the point known as Old Glade Springs, on the wagon road between Baltimore, Maryland, and Knoxville, Tennessee. Its situation is the richest blue-grass section in Washington County, agriculturally one of the best on the state, and possessing the same mineral traces running through the county to Damascus which we find on the Cripple Creek region. In 1865 there were five residences only at this place, and it drew its support from the rich agricultural region, where stock-raising and grazing constitutes the chief pursuit. Now the town has a population of six or seven hundred people, and is on the increase. It lies at the junction of the Saltville branch with the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company, and on that account possesses some importance, while Washington Springs – quite a summer resort – as well as the

Glades, is only some two miles and a half distant. In this place is a large agricultural machinery company, which has the supply of the states of Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Virginia, and which does a handsome business. The situation of the town is in a beautiful country, directly upon the line of the railroad.

Besides being the junction of the railroads already named, Glade Springs has become Quite a school centre, at which the Glade Spring Academy for young men is situated, and a school for young ladies, conducted on a system of the utmost economy consistent with the acquisition of knowledge, health, and true comfort. This college is known as the Southwest Virginia Institute for young ladies, and was first opened for the reception of pupils in 1884, and since that time, under the executive management of M.M. Morriss, D.O. Beatty, and others, had succeeded admirably. The peculiar object and intention of the promoters of this school were worthy in the extreme, for they proposed to found an institution, not for the purpose of making money, but to give ladies in straightened circumstances the best possible culture at the least possible cost. Through the aid of philanthropic persons sums sufficient were obtained to erect the buildings and have sufficient grounds. These were placed in charge of some capable person, rent free, which enabled the principal to take the young ladies at much less than ordinary schools are in the habit of doing. The buildings are increased as the occasion may require by the board of trustees, and kept in thorough repair without expense to the principal. At the last session the faculty was composed of seventeen officers and teachers, while there were one hundred boarders and some forty day pupils. This plan for assisting in the culture of poor young ladies is worthy of the highest commendation, and Mr. M.M. Morriss and Rev. J.R. Harrison, who labored so hard to make it a success, and did so, deserve to have their names carved in the historical niche of education, for we know of no other place formed of this nature in the section of which we are writing. The result is that at this school, a young lady can obtain a course in English language and literature, Latin, German, French, mathematics, natural science, mental and moral philosophy, history, medicine and medical attendance, board, tuition, and calisthenics for the small sum of one hundred and fifty-five dollars. The success of this institution already proves that it is highly appreciated.

Glade Springs does now, and will in the future, derive an importance from Saltville which, casually looking at, one would not observe. It is the junction, or virtually the shipping point from the latter place, on the main line of the Norfolk and Western. Saltville is eight miles distant, and takes its name from the salt works located in Washington County, and which have been in existence for over one hundred years. The brine from these salt works is stronger in saline matter than that of any other situated in the United States that we know of or have heard of as yet. The place, with the works, employees' residences, and pother dwellings, make a population of some five hundred people, located on a lovely plateau of some one thousand acres of indigenous blue grass.

In 1869 the present company, with W.A. Stuart as president, and George W. Palmer as secretary and treasurer, was organized, a capital stock of \$1,000,000 being paid in, and since then the operations have been on the broadest scale, resulting in the employment of over two hundred laborers, clerks, and mechanics, and an output of ten thousand tons of fine salt, which is shipped East and South. Such industries as this are of the most material advantage to any country, and deserve the highest credit. The prosperity and development of not only the immediately surrounding community, but Glad Springs as well, is traceable to this source. George W. Palmer, originally from Syracuse, New York, and W.A. and H.C. Stuart, of Russell County, have played steady, important parts in developing this section and giving employment to hundreds of laborers.

Near this place is the celebrated herd of short-horn registered cattle belonging to the Palmer-Bowman Company. It is said to be the largest herd in the world, and great numbers of them have been shipped to foreign countries as breeding cattle, for which purpose alone are they sold. The Clydesdale and Denmark horses of Mr. Palmer's stock farm have gained quite a reputation for draft and saddle

purposes. Saltville, in every way, is a place of unusual interest, with its salt and plaster works, its lovely scenery, and splendid turf for grazing, and the stock farms of Mr. Palmer. It must necessarily have a good effect upon Glade Springs, and be a potent factor in the development of all around, into which our inquiry has been especially directed.

In giving an account of the cities and towns of Southwest Virginia we have of course confined ourselves to those places which so far have aided most materially in the development of this section, an inquiry into the causes of which has been the object of this imperfect work. But before closing these sketches we desire to say a word or two into the causes of which has been the object of this imperfect work. But before closing these sketches we desire to say a word or two on the subject of these places, and others which are in this country playing their part, the description of which we cannot undertake for the want of space, however much we might desire to do so.

That this whole valley of Southwest Virginia, with its great agricultural resources and mineral deposits, is but in its infancy, is an undeniable fact. All thinking people, business characters, and foreign capitalists are of the same opinion, and at no far off future date, in this very section, there will be cities almost anywhere numbering from five to twenty thousand, and may be more. In advancing this opinion, we are not alone, and we now quote that of others on this score. George W. Palmer, of Saltville, who has been living in this section, says this:

“Whoever lives twenty-five years from today will see a town from her (Glade Springs) to Lynchburg, almost as thickly settled as Pennsylvania. The soil, climate, and mineral wealth are not surpassed by any other country under the sun; for coal, iron, zinc, lead, gypsum, salt, and copper abound throughout the section.”

This opinion is re-echoed by many of the best people in the Southwest; nor is the picture an overdrawn one. The resources of this section only partially developed are of that character which warrant these assertions. Lehigh Valley, in Pennsylvania, dotted every few miles with towns and cities, is neither as profuse in natural, agricultural, and mineral resources, nor blessed with so salubrious a climate, as the Southwest. Then, with capital and energy pouring in, what is to prevent the development of our riches and the building of towns as well as cities? Many gentlemen now residing here are from the mineral district of Pennsylvania, and all admit the superiority of this section both as to climate and minerals; so it is but natural to suppose that these places in due course of time are obliged to become cities. One of the best articles which we have ever seen bearing upon this subject is in the report of the president and directors of the Virginia Development Company to its stockholders, made in April, 1890, in speaking of investments made by that concern. On pages 26 and 27 the language is as follows:

“It must be borne in mind, also, that in Virginia values of farms and town lands, with one or two exceptions, have not increased during the past twenty-five years. The attention of the public had not been generally attracted to the great natural advantages of that section (Southwest Virginia) until within the past six months. During this time there have been very great activity and increase in values, and large amounts of outside capital have been invested. The only real foundation for this is the large number of new industries which are now in course of construction and on prospect. These new industries have already brought and will continue to bring a large population to the towns where they are located. The people of Virginia, moreover, who heretofore have lived in towns distant from the railroads, are moving into the new industrial towns, located on lines of railroad, where there is ample opportunity to invest money advantageously that has been gradually accumulating and lying idle, or to get work at good wages. All this change in population justifies an increase in values of real estate at the favorable places. There are today in Southwest Virginia very few towns of 3,000 inhabitants.

There is no reason why there should be as many towns of from 3,000 to 10,000 inhabitants as in most of Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, and if this district is to become the iron centre which is confidently expected, it is only a question of a few years when, to the traveler, this section will more nearly resemble the active industrial districts of the North than the quiet farming country he has hitherto seen."

The italics in the above are our own.

From this will be gathered the fact that Pennsylvanians themselves are confident that these places will grow to be cities, and nearly all are supporting that confidence by investing largely of their capital in the resources of the country to which they so favorably allude. With the embedded wealth of the country but in its infancy, upon which the welfare of these places depend, we have every right to expect that when the resources are fully matured that many of them will cease to be towns and become cities.