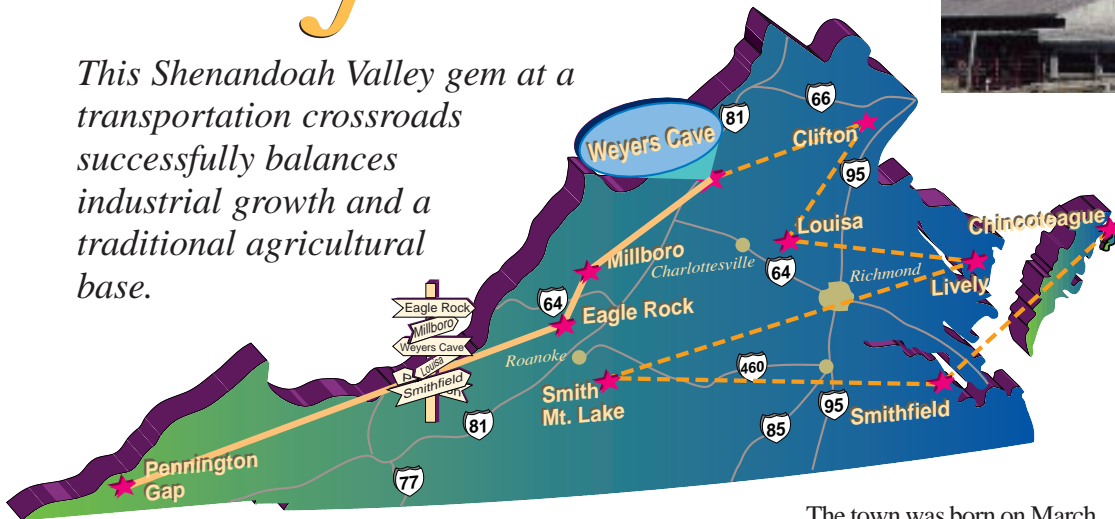


by Nancy Sorrells,
Contributing Writer

During the year 2000, we're making our way around Virginia, each issue visiting a small town and meeting some of the folks who make up the heart of electric co-op country. On this year's fourth stop, we'll be...

Down Home in Weyers Cave

This Shenandoah Valley gem at a transportation crossroads successfully balances industrial growth and a traditional agricultural base.



Perhaps **Sandy Inabinet**, who together with her husband **Alan** runs the Keezletown Road Inn, describes the location of Weyers Cave best: "Weyers Cave is betwixt and between. It's not in Staunton and not in Harrisonburg."

Weyers Cave Postmaster **Linda Clements** puts it another

way when describing this Shenandoah Valley village that sits just south of the Rockingham County line in Augusta County. "It's convenient because it's halfway between places like Staunton, Waynesboro, and Harrisonburg," she says.

Their comments sum up Weyers Cave in a nutshell.

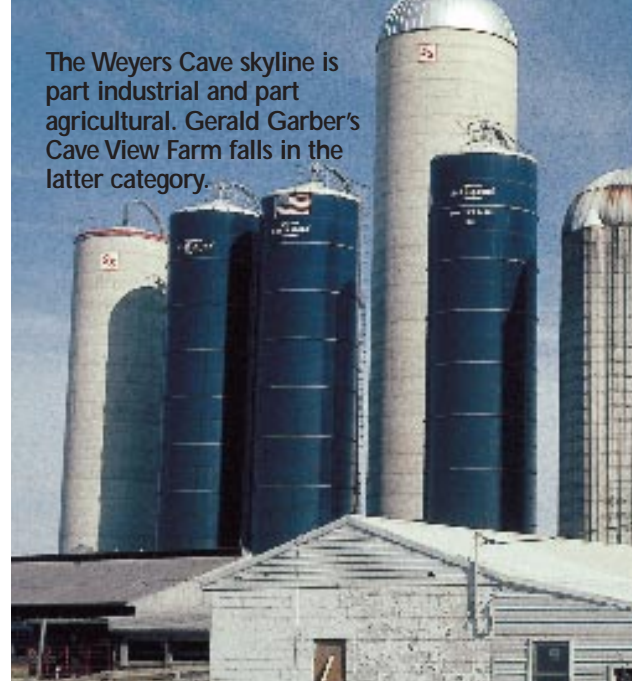


Postmaster Linda Clements goes about her duties at the Weyers Cave post office. She has been postmaster here for five years.

The town was born on March 3, 1874, when the first passenger train chugged into town and stopped at the not-yet-finished depot. The railroad stop was chosen because of its close proximity to all of the aforementioned market cities. A further draw was the fact that another transportation artery, the Valley Pike, was just a short distance away. Such a transportation crossroads meant that farmers could bring goods to the depot and ship them out, merchants could have goods shipped in, and passengers could easily travel to the big cities and beyond.

The brand-new stop on the railroad was named Cave Station because it was the closest railroad stop for tourists who wanted to visit the nearby attraction of Grand Caverns. The post office at Cave Station was named Weyers Cave after Bernard Weyer who discovered the caverns in 1804. The name

The Weyers Cave skyline is part industrial and part agricultural. Gerald Garber's Cave View Farm falls in the latter category.



presents some confusion at times. "We have an interesting history, but the caves are not here. People come and ask about them all the time, and want to know where they are," explains Clements. For the record, they are about 10 minutes up the road in the town of Grottoes.

A century and a quarter after its railroad founding, Weyers Cave is still a transportation hub. The Valley Pike has been downgraded to U.S. Rt. 11 and tolls are no longer charged, but Interstate 81 has been built even closer to the village. The railroad still cuts through the town, but its role has been greatly reduced. Passenger traffic has ceased and the depot was recently torn down.

The new kid on the block, however, is the Weyers Cave





NANCY SORRELLS PHOTOS



Airport, one of eight commercial airports in the state. Operating under the slogan “No place so close can take you so far,” the airport sees 50,000 people a year pass through its gates. Its 6,000-foot-runway can handle anything up to a DC-9. And yet, unlike its bigger rivals in Washington, DC and Richmond, Weyers Cave Airport still has a local atmosphere about it. There are no people movers, no ticket lines, and the ample parking is still, amazingly enough, free.

Entrepreneurial Spirit Prevails

Although in 1874 the Kagey brothers could hardly have envisioned such changes in transportation and commerce, it is certain they would have appreci-

ated the entrepreneurial spirit that still prevails. I.B. Kagey was the town’s first railroad agent, the one who contracted to have freight brought to the new depot he had erected. He and another man opened a general store and post office where Kagey became the first postmaster. On every day but Sunday, one passenger and one passenger/freight train passed through the village.

As business boomed, a cluster of buildings soon appeared around the railroad. Within a few years there were several general stores, two blacksmiths, a school, an undertaker, a telephone switchboard, and a chicken-coop factory. The core of the town, with its Victorian clapboarded houses and fancy Queen Ann residences, all with wide, cool porches, remains intact.

In the 1890s, N.I. Kagey, I.B.’s brother, started a telephone company with all lines running into the Kagey general store. Telephones came to Weyers Cave about the same time that Lut Whitesel’s chicken-coop factory got underway. For more than 80 years the wooden crates were built in the village.

By 1905, there was a bank

Greg Campbell, the executive director of the Weyers Cave Airport, stands on the tarmac just off the airport runway.



Volunteers and staff unload a truck full of overhead projectors for the Equipping the Saints project housed in the old brick schoolhouse.

housed in the big stone building across from the railroad that now stands empty. N.I. Kagey served as the bank’s first cashier. That same year the village electrified itself with a single-cylinder gas engine that stood in town. By 1912, Weyers Cave had one of the first rural electrification systems in the country with power coming from a water-powered mill located on the outskirts of town.

In 1917, a fine brick high school was built in the village. It was here that 28 of the school’s agriculture students formed the nation’s first Future Farmers of America chapter in 1927. Today there are FFA chapters in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

Eventually the high school became an elementary school and then closed altogether in 1995. But the fine brick building does not stand empty. Today the school is once again a beehive of activity under the direction of **Keith Jones** and his outreach ministry, Equipping the Saints. Jones and his mostly volunteer corps gather and disperse items needed in ministries throughout the world. Within the school’s walls where desks and chairs once stood are overhead projectors, clothes, radios, and much

more, all stacked floor to ceiling. They will be used in such countries as Tajikistan, the Philippines, and the Sudan. “The community has been deeply supportive of our work,” Jones says.

A Double-Edged Sword

Even in its early days, the Weyers Cave community walked a tightrope between industry and agriculture. To area farmers, having a transportation hub like Weyers Cave has always been a double-edged sword. The Augusta County Cooperative Farm Bureau, for instance, was founded here in 1929 specifically because of railroad access. At one time farmers could also sell livestock at a small stockyard located in the village.

“When I was 5 or 6 years old, I would come on Saturday with my dad on a wagon with sheep and hogs to be shipped,” says **Miller Kyger**, 78, who grew up in nearby Port Republic, but has lived in Weyers Cave for the last two decades and is the self-appointed caretaker of area cemeteries. “In Weyers Cave everyone had a little something to sell if the weather was open to get there. Sometimes we had to wait in line to get unloaded. It would be nothing to have 12 or

If You Go..

It's easy to find Weyers Cave because it has its own exit off the interstate. Take exit 235 off I-81 and turn east. In one mile you will come to a traffic light. Welcome to Weyers Cave. Turn left and then take any of the next few lefts to get to the heart of downtown.

If you are spending the night, try a room at the **Inn at Keezletown Road**. Soak in the charming Victorian atmosphere of Sandy and Alan Inabinet's century-old house and enjoy a hearty breakfast of green eggs and ham (biscuits). The breakfast requires some explanation. The Inabinets raise their own chickens which supply fresh eggs for the breakfast table.

One variety of chicken lays a green-shelled egg rather than the more typical brown or white shell. Although the outside sports an unusual hue, the egg inside the shell tastes normal and is lower in cholesterol. For reservations, call 540-234-0644 or visit their Web site at www.keezlinn.com.

No visit to Weyers Cave would be complete without a trip to **Grand Caverns**; after all, Thomas Jefferson came all the way from Charlottesville on horseback to visit. The caves are located about 10 minutes from Weyers Cave. When you get to the traffic light at Weyers Cave, go straight through on Rt. 256 until you come to the town of Grottoes. Follow the signs to the caverns. For information, call 540-249-5705.

Twenty minutes in the other direction is **Natural Chimneys Park**, where columns of limestone formations as much as 120 feet high can be seen. The park has camping, picnicking and swimming facilities. Each year on the third Sunday in August, a jousting tournament is held in which competitors test their

horsemanship while trying to spear tiny rings suspended from posts. The park can be reached by calling 540-350-2510.

Civil War enthusiasts are in for a treat if they choose to visit the **Port Republic Museum** just a few miles away. Here Confederate General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson won the final battle of his famous Valley Campaign. To get to Port Republic from Weyers Cave, go straight through the light, heading east on Rt. 256. Go 3.6 miles and turn left on Rt. 605 (Lee Roy Road). Go 3.3 miles and you are in Port Republic. Turn right and the museum is the tan house immediately on your left. This well-preserved village has a self-guided walking tour as well.

The town of Dayton is only about 15 minutes to the west. Here one will find the

Dayton Farmers Market (540-879-9372), **Historic Fort Harrison**, and the **Shenandoah Folk Art Museum and Heritage Center**. The center is a good place to start learning about the area's heritage. The phone number there is 540-879-2681. The town also has a self-guided walking tour.

Downtown Harrisonburg, a few minutes to the north, is home to the **Virginia Quilt Museum** housed in the historic Warren Sipe House. For information, call 540-433-3818.

Seasonally there are other nearby spots to visit. Half a dozen or so times a year the

Green Valley Book Fair offers 500,000 books for sale at 60-90 percent off the cover price. The same folks have an auction house and frequently host estate sales. Call 540-434-4260 or visit their Web site at www.gvbookfair.com. Green Valley is one stop up on the interstate. Just up the road on Rt. 256 is **Mountain River Gardens**, where visitors can pick berries in season. Call 540-249-4442 for further details. Next door is the **Golden Kernel**, offering bulk foods, cheese, local crafts, produce, and Florida citrus. For information, call 540-249-4813. ■



Sandy Inabinet, proprietor of the Inn at Keezletown Road, is holding one of the hand-raised chickens which supply fresh eggs for the breakfast table at the B&B.



Miller Kyger, the self-appointed caretaker of area cemeteries, sets off on his daily duties.

15 teams of horses standing there. We would come up here eight or nine times a year. It was so interesting that my brother and I couldn't wait until we got there. Everybody knew everybody," he remembers.

Farm Bureau a Constant

The stockyards were a thing of the past by the time **Sidney Moyer** began working at the Farm Bureau 44 years ago. "They had already stopped that when I got here, but they were still getting a lot of feed and fence, salt and a lot of bulk fertilizer on the railroad," he recalls. Moyer, who graduated from school on one day and began working at the Farm Bureau the next, has seen a lot of changes in the community, but the presence of the farmers' co-op has been a constant despite the fact



Sidney Moyer prepares paint for a customer at the Augusta County Farm Bureau, where he has worked for 44 years.

that its headquarters have re-located to Staunton.

“At first all we had to sell was feed and seed. After that we got a few groceries and then a little bit of clothing. Now we have just about everything,” Moyer explains on the eve of his retirement.

Gerald Garber, a life-long resident of Weyers Cave, has seen the tug of war that takes place between industry and agriculture in the area. He has just finished building a state-of-the-art computer-controlled milking parlor that will allow him to increase the number of Holsteins he milks from 250 to 500. His barn complex, which includes one of the tallest silos in the country at 132 feet, is almost within shouting distance of downtown Weyers Cave.

Garber is a leader in the community. As an active Ruritan and chairman of the airport commission, he has special insight into the changing needs of an area that is struggling to welcome both industry and agriculture.

“Fifteen percent of Augusta County’s dairy cows are within 1½ miles of downtown Weyers Cave,” he says of the area’s farms. He describes an unwritten plan that has evolved placing most of the industrial growth around the village to the west, while most of the farms, like his, have expanded to the east.

The Best of Both Worlds

For now, at least, residents of Weyers Cave have the best of both worlds. “I have moved three times in my life for a total of two miles,” Garber says. “And I don’t want to move even one mile more.”

Weyers Cave has always been a quiet place to live with people “who care enough to look out for you, but are not so nosy that you can’t stand to have them as neighbors,” he adds.

Even though Weyers Cave is convenient to most of the area’s bigger cities, residents don’t always see the need to go that far away from home. Right in the village is a three-quarters-of-a-million-dollar community center that was paid for the day the townspeople moved in, as well as a 25-acre park that has two ball fields, a soccer field and a jogging track. Both facilities were made possible through the hard work of local civic groups like the fire department and Ruritan club.

“We have two banks, three doctors, a pharmacy, a dentist, a day-care center, and a grocery store. We have everything here you need on a small scale. The greatest thing about Weyers Cave is the people. It’s a good place to live and raise a family,” says Postmaster Clements. ■