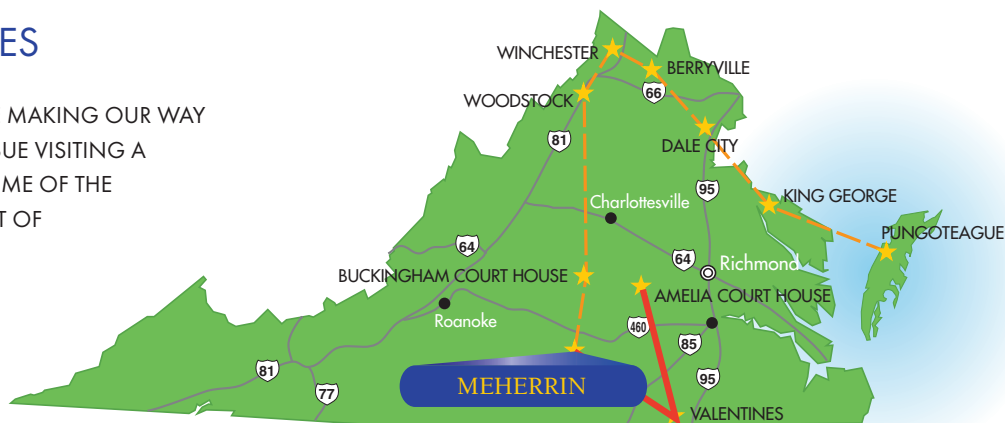


DOWN HOME SERIES

AGAIN IN THE YEAR 2010, WE'RE MAKING OUR WAY AROUND THE REGION, 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 THIRD STOP, WE'LL BE ...



DOWN HOME IN

MEHERRIN

by Crystal Vandegrift, Contributing Writer

Best known as the birthplace and childhood home of world-renowned country-music entertainer Roy Clark, the tiny, rural community of Meherrin, Va., is situated along Highway 360, and is located partially in both Lunenburg and Prince Edward counties.

The history of the community can be traced far back into the 1700s, when it was originally called Moore's Ordinary. A man named George Moore opened an ordinary — a tavern — in August of 1748, and this is generally regarded as when the community now called Meherrin was established. Meherrin is the oldest community in Lunenburg County.

An old legend holds that the word Meherrin came about during an incident that arose between two Native Americans who were fishing in what is now known as the Meherrin River. Each claimed to have caught the same fish. When the fish in question was finally brought ashore, the two began to argue over it, with each fisherman claiming, "Meherrin."

A community as old as Meherrin has seen its share of history over the years. George Walton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, lived nearby during his youth, and during the Revolutionary War, Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton spent the night at Moore's Ordinary.

In 1852 the community began to flourish when the Richmond-Danville Railroad reached it and built the Meherrin Depot, named for the tribe of Indians that lived in the area and along the Meherrin River.

According to **Virginia Price Waller**, who co-wrote the book *Memories of Meherrin* in 1998, the village was a classic example of the early American town. "Private homes and businesses existed side by side," Waller says in her book. "In addition to stores, there was a photographer, churches, inns, a hotel, bar-rooms, schools, blacksmith shops, jeweler, a tailor's shop, tobacco



Country-music legend Roy Clark hails from the community of Meherrin. A sign in front of the Post Office on Route 360 proclaims the community as Clark's birthplace, and the home in which he was born and spent his early years is still standing.

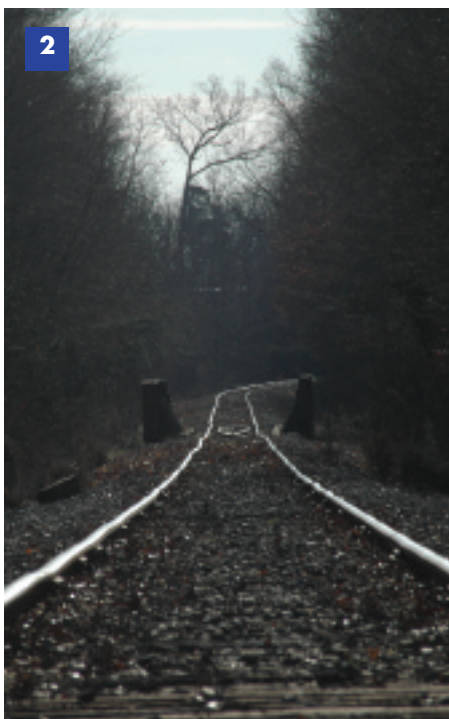


AT A GLANCE ...

POPULATION: 1,838 in the Meherrin ZIP code as of 2000 census

ELEVATION: 591 feet above sea level

FACTOID: Believed to have been established circa 1748, Meherrin is the oldest community in Lunenburg County.



1. The Southside SPCA has a new home on Route 360 just east of Meherrin. This no-kill SPCA facility includes several new state-of-the-art buildings. **2.** Like many small Southern towns, the railroad's arrival marked a watershed point in Meherrin's history and spurred the community's growth. **3.** Meherrin Volunteer Fire & Rescue, Inc., is a vital part of the community. The organization provides service to an area of Southside Virginia approximately 30 miles in diameter.

warehouse, drug store, wire factory, tomato cannery, cucumber briery, stave mill, dispensary, a bank, and a hospital."

Today, the community of Meherrin is like many small villages in Southside Virginia, consisting of a smattering of businesses, churches, a post office and the volunteer fire department. "It certainly was a much larger village at one time than it is now," notes Waller.

The quiet life is just what **Curt Seyler** and his wife were looking for when they moved to Meherrin back in 1991. "We wanted to get away from the traffic and heard that Meherrin would be a good place to be away from that and crime; and, the property taxes are lower," he says.

Seyler also points out that the people of the community make Meherrin the special place that it is. "The people are really friendly and caring. Our house burned down in 1999 and

everyone was very helpful. We had people helping us and giving us money and I knew they could not afford it."

While not originally from the area, **Karren Cooper** is also proud to call Meherrin home. She's a disabled military veteran who moved to Meherrin from Chesterfield County. A native of New York state, Cooper enjoys the rural atmosphere of the area and the warmth of its people. She runs a horse-rescue operation on her property just off of Route 360.

"We rescue neglected, abused, and malnourished horses, get them healthy and try to find them new homes," she says.

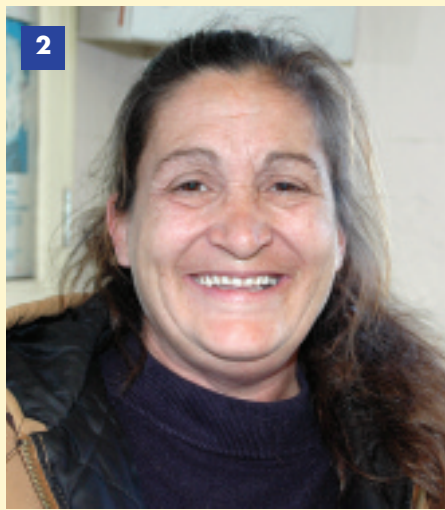
William L. Smith, Jr., is a U.S. Army Vietnam veteran who was born and raised in Meherrin. He moved to Maryland for four years, then migrated to New York, where he spent 40 years working with a trucking company.

"But I always wanted to return home, so when I retired, I came back, built my own home and now I live right next to where I was born, on Doswell Town Road," he says. "It's good to be back home."

When it comes to "what to do" in Meherrin, there's the weekly bingo night at the local meeting hall, and a few community events throughout the year; but the most popular and biggest crowd-drawing event each year has to be the Fourth of July celebration sponsored by Meherrin Volunteer Fire & Rescue, Inc.

Ricky Newman, president of Meherrin Volunteer Fire & Rescue, Inc., is also a lifelong resident of Meherrin. He's been a volunteer for 35 years, and his grandfather was one of the founding members of the volunteer fire department in 1954.

Newman is proud of the volunteer fire department and the work it does. "We've



1. William L. Smith, Jr., lived away from Meherrin for years, but “always wanted to return home.” **2.** A native of New York state, Karren Cooper runs a horse-rescue operation at her Meherrin property. **3.** Retired masonry worker Ernest Williams says Meherrin has people “as good as you’ll find anywhere in Virginia.” **4.** Meherrin Postmaster Rick Elkins shows some of the special Roy Clark pictorial postmarks he’s designed. **5.** The Meherrin Post Office is a focal point of activity in the tiny community. **6.** Ricky Newman, president of Meherrin Volunteer Fire & Rescue, Inc., has been a member of the volunteer unit for 35 years. **7.** Donald and Linda McGlockin are a husband-and-wife team who work at the Southside SPCA. **8.** The Rev. Shawn Reyburn, shown with his children Rebekah and Ronnie, is pastor of Meherrin Presbyterian Church. The Pennsylvania native says people in Meherrin “look out for one another.”

grown from having two trucks to eight vehicles, including two ambulances, five fire trucks and a utility vehicle.” Newman notes that the department provides emergency services to people in a 15-mile radius around Meherrin.

According to Postmaster **Rick Elkins**, the people of Meherrin also enjoy a small but poignant community Christmas celebration each year. “We decorate the tree out in front of the post office, and just have a little community get-together.”

Besides being known as the oldest community in Lunenburg County, Meherrin is also known as the home of Roy Clark. Clark, born in 1933, is a world famous country-music entertainer best known for hosting *Hee Haw*, a network-televised country variety show, from 1969-1992.

Though born in Meherrin, Clark spent his teen years in southeast Washington, D.C., where his father worked at the Washington Navy Yard. The son of two amateur musicians, Clark learned to play banjo, guitar, and mandolin at an early age, and often performed with his father as a teenager.

He was the first country-music artist to open an entertainment venue in Branson, Mo., when he opened the Roy Clark Theater in 1983. This led the way for additional artists who opened more attractions in the city, developing Branson into a national tourist destination for music fans.

Today, if you ask anyone in this charming, small, Southside Virginia community what makes Meherrin unique, they will almost surely answer, “Roy Clark.”

For the past four years, Postmaster Rick Elkins has designed a special pictorial postmark featuring Roy Clark that is used at the Meherrin Post Office for 30 days. “People send us mail from all over the world to have that postmark put on it,” he explains.

Meherrin is also home to the Southside SPCA. The Southside SPCA is a donor-supported, no-kill animal welfare organization well known for its work throughout Southside Virginia. Operating largely with the help of volunteers, the Southside SPCA has saved more than 36,000 pets since the organization first began operations in 1975.

Donald and Linda McGlockin are a husband-and-wife team who both work at the Southside SPCA. Donald has worked at the animal-protection facility nearly 19 years, and Linda has been there more than 17 years.

“This is a clean, modern facility, with heat and air conditioning for the animals and the people working here,” Linda says of the Southside SPCA’s new location, just east of the original SPCA site.

“Everyone’s been so nice to us since we moved into the area in the late 1990s,” Donald notes. “It really is a friendly community,” Linda adds. “I guess that’s what we like most about it.”

Sandy Wyatt, director of the Southside SPCA, explains that, “The Southside SPCA takes animals from 13 counties in Southside Virginia. It is impossible for us to keep up with all the unwanted litters of puppies and kittens being born every week. We encourage everyone to be responsible pet owners and have their pets spayed and neutered, and call the Southside SPCA for assistance.” The phone number is (434) 736-9595.

Though the community of Meherrin is small, it is well served by educational facilities. Nearby colleges include Longwood University, Hampden-Sydney College, and Southside Community College. Nearby facilities also include Prince Edward County Public Schools, Lunenburg County Public Schools, Charlotte County Public Schools, and Fuqua School, a private institution.

When asked how she thinks Meherrin differs today in comparison to the community of 92 years ago, when she was born there, historian Virginia Price Waller sums up things simply: “The days of small towns like Meherrin are gone. Farmers no longer clatter down Main Street to buy groceries or to barter homegrown produce for services. World War II marked the end of the era of the thriving small town in America.”

But today’s Meherrin residents still value their community, its small-town lifestyle, and its warm, traditional values.

Shawn Reyburn is pastor of Meherrin Presbyterian Church and nearby Briery Presbyterian Church. A Pennsylvania native, he first visited the church at Meherrin as a guest preacher while he was a student at Richmond’s Union Theological Seminary. He became pastor at the Meherrin church in 2000, after graduating from seminary.

“This is a very family-oriented community. People are very open and accepting, and genuinely interested in how their neighbors are doing. People here look out for one another,” he says.

Ernest Williams, a retired masonry worker, is a lifelong resident of Meherrin. “I wouldn’t take anything for this community,” he says. “This is a good place, with people as good as you’ll find anywhere in Virginia.”

It’s a theme that echoes throughout the community. As volunteer fire department president Ricky Newman points out, “The nicest thing about Meherrin is that it’s like a big family. People in the community really do live the idea that we are our brother’s keeper.” ■

IF YOU GO...



A sweet-faced rescued mongrel, Miss Wilson, is the resident mascot at the Southside SPCA facility on Route 360 just east of Meherrin.

Southside SPCA — A no-kill, non-profit animal shelter in south central Virginia, in operation since 1975, serving 13 rural counties, and run entirely on donations. Located 60 miles west of Richmond. Dog adoptions are every Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at PetSmart Carmia Way, Chesterfield (off Midlothian Turnpike). Adoptions at the shelter are by appointment only. If you would like to visit the shelter, call (434) 736-9595, email: southsidespcadogs@yahoo.com.

July 4th Fireworks — Every 4th of July Meherrin Volunteer Fire & Rescue, Inc., holds its annual fireworks celebration.

The Keysville Drive-In Movies — Just minutes down the road you can still pull up to a movie at the Drive-In. There are less than 400 drive-in movie theaters in the country and only about a dozen remain in the state of Virginia. Visit them online www.keysvilledrive-in.com.



This marker stands at the site of Meherrin Station, a stop on the Richmond and Danville Railroad that was burned by Union troops during Civil War action in June 1864.