

# HERE & THERE

By Katherine Pyle, 947-5600

## A HISTORY OF BULGER

Little has been written about the village of Bulger, which many of us have simply accepted as another one of the former mining towns on the outskirts of Burgettstown.

In an effort to present some facts about the town to members of St. Ann's Guild last October, I tried to learn more about its history. I found the task much more difficult than I had anticipated. Local history books provide little information; few newspapers exist that tell of the day to day life of the farmers, miners or shopkeepers who lived in, or near, the village. A generation which might have recalled colorful incidents of that period when European immigrants flocked into the village to find work has passed away. Later generations seem to remember little of the time when Bulger was a busy mining town. However, after persistent searching and talking with a number of people who were gracious and eager to help, I was able to accumulate some details which will be presented in this issue and several succeeding issues of the *Enterprise*. Perhaps they will inspire a reader to share his memories of the village with us and thus supply the Fort Vance Historical Society and others with additional history of the town.

### Pioneers

Probably John Allen or Abraham Scott first owned the land where Bulger is today. Allen received a warrant for his land in 1784, and is credited with having built a fort some ten years earlier near the Smith and Robinson Township line. It was to be known as Allen's Fort. To the north was Fort Beeler at Candor and to the south Fort Cherry, so early settlers in the region were reasonably protected from Indian attacks. In 1807, Abraham Scott also received a warrant for land in the region, but little is known of either him or Allen.

### "Reynolds"

The settlement which later became Bulger grew gradually and is referred to in old deeds as "Reynolds." When the Pittsburgh-St. Louis Railroad was completed in 1865, the name, "Reynolds," was dropped and the station, which was one of the stops between Pittsburgh and Steubenville on the Pennsylvania Railroad, was called Bulger. Nobody knows for sure where this name came from. However, there is a marker in the Noblestown Cemetery to a family with that name. Perhaps the town was named in the family's honor.

## Lots are Formed

In June of 1866, two Pittsburgh lawyers, Charles Lockhart and William Frew, laid out 61 lots along the railroad in the vicinity of present Bulger. The land at that time was referred to as the Alexander Donnan Tract and had been owned at a later date by a man named Woodburn.

### Tunnel Constructed

When the railroad was built, a tunnel was constructed near Bulger Station, but in 1905, the tunnel was eliminated and the station was moved westward about 1,000 feet. In 1906, a public road crossing was changed to an overhead bridge with a pedestrian sidewalk along the bridge.

Mrs. Katherine LeCouvre remembers the celebration which was held when the tunnel was eliminated. She had suffered an attack of polio and was taken to the event in a carriage.

### Shipping Dairy Products

A. J. Russell was the first station agent and was later followed by at least three others: C. C. Gist, Leonard Cornell and Earl Remmert.

Dairy products were shipped in large quantities from the Bulger station in the early years. In 1881, a Butter and Cheese Association, with Thomas Ackleson as president, was formed. A frame building was constructed just below the site of the present St. Ann's Catholic Church. It became a cheese factory operated by Leonard Hermes, father of Mrs. Katherine LeCouvre. There is a record that 1,000 cheeses were produced in the first four months, each averaging 33 pounds. A nearby pond froze in winter, providing ice blocks for the cheese factory. Before these were cut, young people used the pond for skating. The factory building was later torn down and Bill Johnson is said to have used the lumber for his home.

A telegraph tower stood near the railroad and was manned through the years by various persons: Barber, Shumaker, Lehman, Lingen and Eversole (probably not in that order).

### Fire At Russell's

A. J. Russell was an important figure in early Bulger history. He was a Civil War veteran who soon after that war established a mercantile business which he carried on for more than 30 years in Bulger. Besides serving as a railroad agent, he was postmaster at Bulger, a justice of the peace in Smith Township, treasurer of Midway Bank and an elder in the U. P. Church. His general store was lo-

cated "on Limestone Street and Station Park," across from the present Tabone property in Bulger. He eventually built the Tabone house for his home.

His store, two dwellings and a butcher shop were all under one roof, and on Aug. 22, 1904, all burned, involving a loss of \$12,000, besides a \$500 loss in furniture, a goodly sum at that time. He also lost two surreys, a lot of hardware and the contents of a buggy shed. At the time of the fire, C. R. Rogers was running the store, and J. J. Petrosky, the butcher shop. It was thought that the fire was caused by a drinking party in the buggy shed.

### Mines Opened

As was the custom for many years, families in this area dug their own coal for household use where it cropped out close to the surface.

Records of the Bureau of Mines indicate that in 1901, Bulger Block was operating as a shaft mine and Verner Mine a slope mine. That year Bulger Block had 42 men employed; Verner, 26. In 1907, Verner Mine was employing 295 men and shipped 216,054 tons of coal. Bulger Block, the same year, employed 292 men and shipped 204,898 tons.

By 1919, production at Bulger Block had decreased to 161,173 tons and Verner to 42,645 tons.

Records are extremely sketchy, and names of mine owners and superintendents have been gathered from those who remember them. Joe Robb was an owner of Bulger Block. The Beadlings owned Verner Mine. Later Verner was owned by C. C. McGregor. Among the superintendents were men named Hunt, Krupar, Clark, Fagan, Wagner, Kirsopp, Meute, McConaughy and Williams.

### Houses Built

As the mines developed, housing for the employees became a major problem. Robert McFarland was one who was hired by the coal companies to build houses at Bulger. Eight-room frame dwellings designed for two families having four rooms each were a common type of house in mining communities. There were 35 such houses in Bulger Block; about 10 at Verner Mine. Families usually had as many as eight or ten children, and often boarders or roomers were taken in to live with them.

There was no running water. Kerosene was used for light until electricity was provided. Coal stoves were used for heating and outdoor ovens for baking. The people usually raised chickens, ducks or geese. Some had a cow or hog.

Children spent their summer vacations frequently picking coal from the nearby slate dumps or along the railroad tracks. They carried it home in sacks or small wagons. Vasco Burchianti had a goat cart. Mr. Kargle made a harness for the goat. Sometimes railroad engineers banged the coal cars together to spill the coal on the tracks so the children could gather it.

Berry picking was another summer occupation for the children. The bushes grew in profusion, especially along the slope of Bulger Hill. To make a little money, the children sold the berries or they collected old rags, iron or bones to sell to the rag man, who would purchase them for a few pennies. On summer evenings, the children frequently congregated at a convenient spot to play tag, "go sheepy go" or hide and seek. Their forebearers were a mixture of European nationalities, French, Italian, Irish, Slovenian and others. All children and their parents, however, were unconsciously being woven into the interesting fabric of America.

## A HISTORY OF BULGER

### PART II

#### The Merchants

As the population of Bulger grew, a few individuals saw a need and an opportunity for opening stores that would provide the residents with various commodities. No concrete road was constructed to Burgettstown or Midway until the early 1920's, and traveling except by train was no easy matter, so stores were welcome in the little community.

J. M. Aiken established a store early in the century on the same street where A. J. Russell's business had flourished and where the honor roll is today. Aiken sold hardware, lumber and feed. As cars became more numerous, he installed a gasoline pump with a glass top.

Aiken was also the postmaster and Cora Winters was employed in the office. Mrs. LeCouvre and her sister also assisted Aiken in the post office about 1912. The Aikens lived in a big house across from the present church.

Jules Darras opened a general store near the station about 1901. He continued in business until 1936, selling meats, groceries, boots and shoes and some fabrics. In those days, dill pickles were sold from a big barrel; bananas hung in bunches; prunes and apricots were kept in a wooden case. There was a long counter of penny candy, and meats were sold from a screened-off area and kept in ice boxes. Ceiling fans kept the store cool in summer.

Helen Jom, who worked as an employee at Darras's, remembers "Half Cup of Coffee," for which one received coupons that were good for aluminium pans.

During the Twenties, deliveries were made from Darras's store with a horse and wagon. The post office was eventually moved from Aiken's to Darras's. A mailbag was put on a hanger near the tracks for the postal clerk on the train to pick it up. William Bane usually hung it there; occasionally the job was done by Helen Jom.

Mrs. Darras sometimes welcomed women who came alone to Bulger on the train, their husbands having sent for them to come from Europe. One woman remembers her mother being so grateful to Mrs. Darras for this act of kindness.

During World War I, the Kaiser was burned in effigy not far from Darras's store by a group eager to show their patriotism to America and their disrespect for Germany.

Quinto Bianchi also had a grocery or general store in Bulger beginning about 1905. In 1946, Jim and Sara Bianchi took over the business and ran it for a number of years. The Bianchis also had a garage on Main Street. The store building is now used as an apartment house.

In the same building with their home in Bulger Block, Dominick and Anselma Dellapina had a store from about 1925 until 1944. They sold meats and groceries, and Louise Dellapina Burchianti recalls that eggs were sold loose, not in boxes of a dozen as they are today. Cookies were usually kept in tin containers. Wieners hung on a string, and the store had a walk-in ice box.

An important commodity in the early days was kerosene, as it was used for lighting before electricity was installed in the miners' houses. People came with tin cans to the Dellapinas to buy the kerosene, which was kept in a big vat equipped with a spigot. The kerosene often dripped out of the spigot to make the floor black and greasy.

The Dellapina building, which is still in existence, once had a big porch on the front where young people gathered in the evenings for music and fun.

Apparently there were two company stores in Bulger, one in the Block area, another not far from the present church. Mrs. Merloni later kept a store in the latter of these two buildings. One of her employees was Mary Pendeville. Mrs. Merloni's husband had owned a movie theater and skating rink not far from the site of the mine power house. An explosion in the building not only destroyed it, but also killed Mr. Merloni.

Other merchants included Anton Zilich, who had a grocery in the Block and later owned the store which had been a company store and was purchased by Mrs. Merloni; Louie Cohen, who had a store across the bridge; and Joseph Anuskiewicz, who owned a small business and barber shop.

Blacksmith shops were a necessity for mules were used in the mine. Winters had a blacksmith shop in Bulger and Gilson one at Verner.

Frank Moretti had a Hupp Mobile business in the Bianchi building.

Judy Baronio had a beauty shop in the Darras store building.

Alban Dalverny operated a barber shop.

Gus Leunis opened a tire recapping business in Bulger in the 40's during the war. He and Leonard Hermes then had a service station. Today Meerdo's business includes a dairy store.

#### Shady Lane

In reviewing Bulger history, one can't overlook a favorite night spot of the early Thirties. Shady Lane was originally a dance hall established by Joseph and Anna Bokulich of Verner Mine about 1934. It was located in a lovely grove of trees near the road that leads from the main highway to Verner Mine. The bands that played at Shady Lane drew crowds from far and near, and in time some of the musicians who entertained there became famous. It has been reported that among these were Perry Como, Bobby Vinton, Johnny Cimino and Phil Lewis. Dances were held three and four times a week, and the hall was rented out for various celebrations. Later the Bokuliches added living quarters to the building and Joseph Bokulich, Jr., and his wife, Mary, lived there and raised a family of five daughters. Eventually the dance hall and the beer garden, which was another addition to the building, were sold. Today Shady Lane is a bar, lounge and restaurant which is open every day but Mondays. It is owned by Dave Miller of Candor.

Geno "Wess" Dellapina owned and operated a tavern and pool hall in Bulger for many years, and later took over ownership of the former Tullio Pozzan tavern. The latter is now owned by Duane Fowler.

#### BULGER POST OFFICE

The first post office in Bulger, according to the Postmaster General's Office in Washington D. C., was established in 1869 with James Russell as postmaster. A. J. Russell followed as postmaster in 1872, and then J. M. Aiken in 1905. Other postmasters who have been in charge of the Bulger office include

Thomas Hermes, 1916; Cōra Winters, 1918; Mrs. Bessie Aiken, first acting postmaster in 1925, then regular postmaster in 1926; John Darras, 1935; Margaret Darras, 1936; Geno M. Dellapina, acting postmaster, 1966; John A. Antonetti, 1968; Patricia Fratini, officer in charge, 1980; Alan C. Henderson, officer in charge, 1980; and Patricia Fratini, 1980.

Some postal employees of later years were Mary Louise Carney, Betty Testas and Mae Kargie Kerekes. Jim Ray was an early mail carrier and is said to have donated the organ to Candor Church. Other rural carriers were Audley Dowler and Fred Blanchard. Bulger has always had a long rural route and many farmers in both Smith and Robinson Townships have received mail through the Bulger post office.

During World War II, the post office was promoted from a fourth to a third class office.

The new post office building was opened in October of 1981.

#### **Bulger School**

Many people living today will remember the Bulger School, which was located on the corner across from the present Meerdo's Service Station. The school was built in 1873, J. D. Pedicord having been awarded the contract to build it at a cost of \$1,000. For many years, it housed grades one through eight.

On Friday evening, April 5, 1901, a program was given at Bulger School to raise money for a school bell. Among those taking part were Tommy, Mike and Lillie Hermes, Ralph Ray, Earl Jones, Alice Green, Ethel, Sadie and Bertha Anderson, Agnes, Anna and Will Dugan, Elsie, Clara, Agnes, Sarah, John and Will Smith, John, Roy, Ellen and Effie Cummins, Mabel Clare, Harry Winters, Neil and George McFarland, Mary and Will Pedicord, and Rowland and Harold Cully. Admission for the program was 10 and 15 cents.

W. T. Slater was the first teacher employed for the term of 1873-74. A partial list of those who taught at Bulger through the years follows: Lizzie Hoffman Smith, O. T. Cooke, Mattie Campbell, C. J. Vance, John F. Vance, Kate Hammond Campbell, Anna G. Hickman, A. P. Dennis, A. J. Smith, Nettie George Wallace, Hattie Donaldson, William Melvin, Charles Briceand, Anna Vance, Hallie Criss Taylor, R. R. Stevenson, John E. Brown, Kate Geary, Brilla Lyon, H. G. Noah, Lillian Pyle, Laura Sprowls, Elizabeth Stephenson, Sam Neil, Bessie Wilson, Clarence Cowen, Eva Heinrich, Edith McElhaney, Georgine Holmes, Margaret Holmes, Mary Ralston, Rhea Munger, Mary Anderson, Helen Ballard, Wilbert

Weich, Otto Kraeër, Josephine Morgan, Margaret Ballard, Marie Montgomery, Louise Yolton McCullough, Thelma Culley Fliton, ———— McConnell, Clair Jackson, Betty Aver, Betty Reynolds Culley, Robert Smith, George Love, Golda Daudet Spillane, Luella Kaste, Ruth Cooley, H. E. Reynolds, Elizabeth King, Margaret Ralston, Evelyn Danielson, Charles Burns, Dorothy Ingfield Axtell, Yvonne Helas, Estelle Bunnerman Phillips, Nina Kenny, Emma Jane Lawson Miller, Luella Felch, Frances Farmer and Maxine Moore.

Bulger School was gradually consolidated with other schools in the area until only grades one to four remained. Luella Felch had grades one and two and Maxine Moore grades three and four when the school was finally closed in 1953.

In the early years children, of course, walked to school. Those attending Union High School either rode the train to Burgettstown or hitch-hiked. We were told that some of the grade school boys who lived in the Block crawled through a sewer

To school.

#### **HISTORY OF BULGER PART III**

Bulger, like any other small town, has had its share of individual tragedies.

Besides the fire that destroyed Russell's mercantile business, there were others. D. W. Smith, a local farmer, early in the century, lost in a fire, a barn with 12 tons of hay, 30 bushels of wheat, a wagon, a cart, a feed mill, fodder cutter and 60 barrels of cement. About 41 barrels of the cement belonged to Oliver Neil.

In 1915, the Bulger station building and a large stretch of boardwalk burned, along with some consignments of freight. Leonard Cornell was the station agent at the time.

Twice before 1930, the Catholic church at Bulger was destroyed by fire. Cohen's store also burned, and the home of Angelo and Katherine Baronio and their four sons was lost in a fire. A mule barn at Bulger went up in flames, destroying three mules that had been used in the mine. Mrs. Josephine Templeton, whose father was employed to look after the mules, remembers this event. She also recalls a time when one of the mules her father tended had to be shot. She held the mule while her father did the shooting.

Almost every mining town has stories of accidents occurring to the miners. Bulger was no exception. Michael Hermes was killed by falling slate at the Verner Mine. Jules Dalare, according to a newspaper

printed in 1917, lost his life at Bulger Block. Joe Evonovich died in a mining accident, and Adam Kaezyk fell down a mine shaft and broke his ribs and pelvis. Renny Freville injured his leg in another accident. Vasco Burchianti is reported to have saved a man from being killed by a mine railroad car.

The Pennsylvania Railroad was the scene of a violent wreck when two trains once collided at Bulger. Pictures of this event have been preserved.

R. S. Cook, an early landowner at Bulger, was killed by a railroad engine June 9, 1893, as he was crossing the tracks. Others who lost their lives on the railroad included Mrs. Rooney, who was killed on a New Year's Day; Mike Tizik and Adeana DiNino. A tragedy was averted when James Deer saved the life of Ida Gillis, who was almost struck by a train. He later married her.

An automobile accident at the Bulger church corner was responsible for the death of Henry Janulewicz. Fifi Kristoff was injured in a car wreck near Shady Lane.

Many people remember the death of William Fratini, a two-year-old child who was drowned in a cistern.

"Slim" Dash was reportedly shot after a poker game at the Verner Mine.

When Bill Core, a local police officer, was blinded with shot in a farm house near Bulger, some of the offenders involved were later apprehended at the station in Bulger. They were also reported to have stopped at the home of Jules Adams for shells.

#### **Medical Assistance**

Two doctors in particular served the people of Bulger during the first few decades of the 1900's: Dr. Moore of Midway and Dr. McCullough. They sometimes rode horseback to make house calls.

Dr. Moore is known to have taken Eloi Freville's tonsils out on the kitchen table at his home. Home surgery was not uncommon in those days.

Women seldom, if ever, went to a hospital to have their babies. Women in the Blocks helped each other at such times. Twins were a rare occurrence, and in a period of 33 years, only one set of twins was born at Bulger. They were Marguerite and Josephine, the children of Joseph and Marguerite Freville, who came to Bulger in 1907 from France.

An event which created much interest in the community was Dr. Pengor's Medicine Show, which was held occasionally at Merloni's Hall. Pills for every imaginable ailment from tapeworms to pneumonia were offered for sale at this show.

## Burials

When Bulger residents died in the early days of this century, they were usually laid out at home. Pallbearers carried the casket to the train station after the funeral, and it was sent by rail to Noblestown for burial. Some families, however, not of the Catholic faith, buried their loved ones at Candor or Robinson.

## Clubs and Organizations

Two nationality clubs, the French Club and the Italian Club, existed for many years in Bulger. The Italian Club building is no longer standing. The VFW now uses the French Club building as their headquarters.

With the return of soldiers after World War II, the Skinner-Brun Post of the VFW was formed. The name honored Joe Skinner, who had been killed at the Battle of the Bulge, and John Brun, who had died in an automobile accident about the time the post was organized.

Jim Bianchi was chosen as the first commander of the post, and Bert Roner was the first quartermaster.

An Auxiliary to the Vets was also organized in 1948, with Jean Dellapina as the first president. The Auxiliary not only assisted the Vets in various projects, but the women helped to provide Christmas treats for the children and marched in local parades. Mrs. Freville is said to have made flags for the parades.

A temporary honor roll was established soon after the war, but was replaced with a permanent one on the grounds where A. J. Russell had once had his store. Dedicatory services were held at the time of these two events.

## Sports

Depression days provided few recreational opportunities for children in the Bulger area, but young people were fortunate in finding someone to encourage them in sports. As early as 1919, Wilbert Welch, who taught at Bulger School, organized a ball team.

Paul Moreau, Tony Rometti and Gino Bianchi all can tell stories about the successes of early ball teams.

When "Father Casey" arrived in Bulger in 1923 to be pastor of St. Ann's Church, local sports enthusiasts found a real kindred spirit. It was soon discovered that Father Casey could hit a baseball farther than most fellows in the Bulger neighborhood. Pictures still exist of Father Casey, together with his ball team. When the school district provided summer recreational programs in later years, both boys and girls became involved in sports. Bulger boys who attended Union High School were frequently outstanding athletes. Others were inspired to follow events in the world of sports.

Mike Nixon (Nicksick), who originally was from Slovan, later made his home in Bulger. He had acquired a reputation as a great football and basketball player while still in high school. He eventually went on to coach the Steelers, the Redskins and the Browns.

## The Church

In a small town such as Bulger, many people looked to the church, not only for spiritual guidance but also for entertainment and diversion. St. Ann's provided numerous social activities through the years: parties, bazaars, festivals and dinners. Mrs. Vincy Tabone, who recently celebrated her 85th birthday, remembers making spaghetti for church dinners. She used a boiler and a tub, and water was carried from the priest's home to the church in buckets since there was no public water supply. A strawberry festival was held in Wilson's yard. Today Father O'Neil has, by establishing a travel club, encouraged folks to travel or to attend interesting activities in other communities.

St. Ann's Catholic Church began prior to 1916, as a mission of St. Alphonsus Church at McDonald. However, Father Andrew Rudnicki, associated with Saints Peter and Paul at Cherry Valley, began about 1912, to administer to Catholics at St. Ann's Mission. In May of 1916, Mrs. Anna-Hermes donated ground for a church at Bulger. The cornerstone was laid in October of 1916, and a rectory was built in 1918.

A news item written in 1917 by Louis F. S. Cook about the dedication of the first church at Bulger, stated that a catechism class was organized a few years earlier in a little house at the rear of Martin Davin's home. The first confessions were heard in Bulger at the Davins' house. The first Christmas Mass was conducted by Father McCashin in 1915. Sunday School was held in the nickelodian hall except for the fourth Sunday of the month, when the hall was occupied.

St. Ann's continued to be a mission of Sts. Peter and Paul until 1923, when the situation became reversed and the Cherry Valley Church was made a mission of St. Ann's.

It has been said that a Polish school once was held in the church.

In 1930, following the burning of the second church, the present church building was erected. A rectory was added just recently.

Pastors who have served St. Ann's parish and church are as follows: Rev. Andrew Rudnicki: 1914-1915; Rev. James Wrobel: 1916-1918; Rev. Joseph Kulacz: 1918-1923; Rev. Casimir Kosciusz (Casey): 1923-1933;

Rev. John F. Robacewski: 1933-1948; Rev. William McCashin (served as pastor immediately after the death of Fr. Robacewski); Rev. Joseph Wank: 1948-1952; Rev. Paul Leger: 1952-1956; Rev. Joseph Sullivan: 1956-1964; Rev. George Garber: 1964-1983; Rev. Thomas O'Neil: 1983-(serving at present).

In the years that St. Ann's has existed at Bulger, one member chose to become a priest. He is Father Leo Burchianti, presently a pastor at West Aliquippa. He is the son of Vasco and Louise Burchianti.

No Protestant church existed in Bulger, but a Protestant Sunday School was once held in the schoolhouse with Roy Wolfe in charge. Sarah Smith of Bulger was a teacher in the Sunday School.

## Amusing Recollections

Those who have lived in Bulger for many years, or who grew up in the community, may have recollections of incidents that created some dismay or amusement at the time of their occurrence. For example, a hayrick was once found the morning after Halloween on top of the coalhouse roof at the school, and a huge pumpkin mysteriously disappeared from Harris Smith's cornfield. One day a goat found its way into the schoolhouse and reached the second floor before it was chased downstairs and outdoors.

## Bulger in 1986

About 734 people make their home on the 703 acres which composes Bulger and the Verner Mine area today, according to tax records. Some have built lovely new homes in the neighborhood. Others have remodeled older houses into trim and attractive dwellings, but only an occasional train rumbles along the Pennsylvania Railroad, and none stop as they once did at Bulger. No longer does a passer-by see a group of miners, blackened with coal dust, trudging home carrying their dinner pails after long weary hours underground. The residents of Bulger, if they are a part of today's working world, are probably driving to and from jobs elsewhere. But the town remains, a tidy livable community where some folks have found a comfortable and desirable way of life.

History of Bulger, Pa., was written by Katherine Pile of Burgettstown, Pa. and was published in three parts, beginning Feb. 26, 1986 in the Burgettstown Enterprise.