

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BEGINNINGS OF DALE BOROUGH

WRITTEN BY UNKNOWN AUTHOR IN 1981

From the standpoint of geographic location, Dale Borough holds a unique position among all of Cambria County's political subdivisions.

Dale Borough is, in effect, a municipality within a municipality. It is surrounded by the City of Johnstown; it is not possible to enter or leave the borough without passing through some part of the city proper.

This unusual circumstance results – to some extent- from the chronological turn of events in the city's early history. Dale Borough was not in existence, as such, until in 1889, when most of the boroughs in the Conemaugh Valley joined to form the third class City of Johnstown. Otherwise, Dale might have been among them.

Nearly two years later, when residents of Dale area sought separation from Stonycreek Township, the adjacent young city was already beset with financial and administrative problems common to new enterprise. The people of Dale thus choose to acquire their municipal identity and petitioned for a borough charter.

It was on March 9, 1891, that Dale's charter was granted. At that time approximately 1,000 persons lived within its boundaries. Today (1981) it has 2,000 residents.

By court records, Dale is just 90 years old. But its historical roots extend deep into the 19th century.

Dale's irregular boundaries form a roughly shaped triangle. Its broadest base extends generally north and south along Bedford Street and Von Lunen Road; its northern apex narrows to a sharp point just a few blocks from the very center of Johnstown proper.

By its very proximity to downtown Johnstown, Dale played a supporting role in the Conemaugh Valley's earliest history.

In pre-settlement days, Dale lay astride an Indian trail known as the Conemaugh Path – the earliest overland route into Conemaugh Valley and the present site of Johnstown.

Early traders and settlers passed through Dale as they traveled between Bedford and Johnstown; some of them stopped here.

The Pickworth and the Horner families cleared the first known farms in the Dale area. The Pickworth average was located on the hillside, in the vicinity of Cliff and Arthur Streets. The Horner farm was located near present Walnut Grove area, and the Horner homestead was at the present site of the Homestead Avenue Evangelical United Brethren Church.

As early as 1800, according to one historian, John Horner had erected a dwelling, store room, saw mill and grist mill where McMillen Street and Von Lunen Road now intersect. One of the mill rooms was used as a school during the winter season.

With the Conemaugh Path the only established route in and out of the valley, it soon became known as the Bedford Pike. As travel over the Pike increased, Dale gradually acquired more residents.

Eventually Bedford Pike became a toll road with three toll gates in or near Dale Borough. One was at Bedford and Horner Streets, another at Bedford Street and Von Lunen Road, and a third on Bedford Street in the present Walnut Grove Area.

Despite its importance as a local traffic artery, Bedford Pike, or Bedford Street, was not paved until 1894. About 1940, cobblestones were replaced by concrete.

Recorded history of the borough goes back to the date of incorporation in 1891. The first burgess was Joseph R. Hummel, a Civil War veteran who served as burgess and weigh-master for approximately 20 years.

Members of the first Borough Council were B. F. Stull, president; George Leppert, Cyrus L. Wissinger and a Mr. Hoffman.

The borough's first wooden school building was erected at the present site of Dale Public School on Arthur Street. Another was erected on Slagle Street just off of Von Lunen road. Both were ungraded.

Among the first school directors were N. S. Lehman, L.R. Brallier, M. H. Myers and A. D. Brubaker.

In 1902 the original Arthur Street structure was torn down to make way for a four room brick building that is still in use. Lumber from the razed building went into some of the early Dale homes that are still standing.

A one year high school course was begun in 1905. The second high school year was added in 1906, the third in 1911 and the fourth in 1915. First graduates of the high school were Miss Iva Varner and Miss Louise Rigby (Mrs. Charles Ling). They were graduated from Dale's two year high school and later attended Johnstown High to complete their school work.

The fire company, organized in 1893 as the Dale Hook and Ladder Company, is one of the oldest volunteer organizations in the Johnstown District. The original company had 30 members with Charles S. Myers as fire chief.