

Riding the stage coach back to Rosecrans

By DAVID KAGAN dbkagan@comcast.net

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ROSECRANS - Adventurer Sam Motter, bootlegger Prince David Farrington, Civil War veteran George Wagner and general store manager "Tillie" Kreamer were four colorful figures in the history of the village of Rosecrans.

Just north of Loganton about two miles, along Route 477 past the Route 80 intersection, Rosecrans is a mountaintop community in Clinton County's Greene Township. Despite its location, it always has been considered a part of Sugar Valley.

When George Wagner returned to his 125-acre Pennsylvania farm from his duties as a Union soldier in the great "War Between The States," he named the recently emerged hamlet there Rosecrans, in honor of Maj. Gen. William Starke Rosecrans. Wagner had served under Rosecrans at the Sept. 19-20 Battle of Chickamauga near Chattanooga, Tenn.

Wagner became, arguably, Rosecrans' leading citizen for many years. On July 25, 1877, he was appointed the village's third postmaster (after Thomas Furst, appointed April 24, 1863, and then Charles W. Milner, appointed February 19, 1866), operating that and a general store out of his home until 1914.

In 1880, Wagner was elected Justice of the Peace for Greene Township. He also served one term as the township's tax collector, another as a supervisor. In addition, he was an elder, a deacon and a trustee in the Mt. Pleasant Church, and a teacher and superintendent in its Sunday school.

Wagner's daughter, Matilda "Tillie" Wagner Kreamer, managed her father's general store for many years. She married Turbit W. Kreamer, who became Rosecrans' fourth and final postmaster on Feb. 10, 1914, following the death of her father. The Rosecrans' post office was discontinued shortly thereafter, on Nov. 30, 1914.

The Kremers continued operating the general store and farming for years. After the store finally closed, Turbit Kreamer worked as a carpenter. Matilda Kreamer is buried in the Mt. Pleasant Cemetery, located at the intersection of Route 477 (Long Run Road) and Brungard Road, with a stone that simply reads, "Tillie Kreamer 1872-1941."

Motter (1850-1921) also is buried in the Mt. Pleasant Cemetery in Rosecrans. A farmer, trapper, fisherman and "adventurer," Motter enjoyed life on the mountain above Loganton. Apparently quite an eccentric character, he was said to have had a wildcat as a pet, to have rarely ever worn shoes and to have constantly been under the suspicious, watchful eyes of law enforcement agents, but never arrested.

One story has it that he walked all the way to California (mostly carrying his shoes on his back) to obtain an inheritance of \$2,500 from his father. After returning to Rosecrans from that adventure, he was supposedly thereafter called "California Sam."

Farrington (1890-1956), the legendary bootlegger during Prohibition days (1920-33), came to Greene Township's mountaintop area around Rosecrans in 1921 from his home state of North Carolina. He purchased the Florida Fruit Farm as a cover-up for his stills, making high quality whiskey from grain purchased from local farmers. He shipped his bootleg out by trucks and trains.

It has been estimated that one of his large stills could produce 2,000 gallons a day. A further estimate was that he made up to \$2 million a year during his five-year residence in Clinton County, before moving to Lycoming County. It is said that he was very generous, donating significant portions of his profits to area churches and poor families. Known as the "Robin Hood" of hooch, ironically he died a poverty-stricken man.

The predominantly German settlement of Greene Township's mountainous area really began with the building of sawmills. Jacob Frantz, sometime between 1830 and 1835, erected one on the headwaters of McElhattan Run (Creek). By 1883 the sawmill was owned by Andrew Jamison and being run by steam power. And, at the same time, about a mile below this mill, J. Herman operated another mill on the same run.

Other sawmills included Thomas Furst's, constructed about 1847 along Long Run, called the "Philadelphia Mill." And there is record of a Rockey's Mill on Rockey Run.



DAVID KAGAN/Sun-Gazette Correspondent
Farmhouses at Rosecrans, on the
mountain above Loganton in Clinton
County

Mountaintop one-room schools in the 1800s in Greene Township included the Rockey (or Green Grove) School, the Knarr (or Green Hill) School and the Sheats (or Mount Pleasant) School. Open five months a year, the schools must have had dedicated teachers, as they reportedly were only paid \$27 to \$30 a month, and they had to pay their own board.

Of course, all those schools have long since passed into history. The Knarr School building erected in 1877 educated children until 1953. Pupils then were transported to Loganton, Sugar Grove, Greenburr and Tylersville schools. The Knarr structure was sold in 1954 to Harry R. Mengel for his summer home.

The first Rockey School edifice burned in 1878. A replacement was built that same year between George Rockey's and Charles Reeder's homes. Closed in 1920, it was sold to J. H. Rockey in 1926, and subsequently razed. Students attended the Knarr School after the closure of Rockey.

A record shows that the Sheats School closed in 1952, with its pupils then bused to Loganton. Harry Herman bought the building in 1954 for a campsite.

Rosecrans' religious records begin with the erection of a Mt. Pleasant Chapel in 1868 on the present site of the Mt. Pleasant Cemetery. The Evangelical Brethren agreed with the Evangelical Lutherans to share use of the house of worship.

Then, in 1893, the Mt. Pleasant Evangelical (Brethren) Association Church was built at the present intersection of Route 477 and Spring Lane. In 1968 the denomination withdrew from the Evangelical United Brethren and became Mt. Pleasant Community Church. Today, it continues as the Mt. Pleasant Bible Church.

In 1938, Pilgrim of Holiness members pitched a tent in the Jesse Matter orchard at Rosecrans, in which to hold services. In winter, they used the Matter home. Then in 1941, Matter donated land for a permanent church, built under the direction of Reverends Kresge and Finch, with stones hauled from nearby Mt. Riansares.

In 1968, the church merged with Wesleyan Methodist and became the Loganton Wesleyan Church, which it remains today. Also in 1968, a brick parsonage was erected. Then in 1987, a new sanctuary was constructed, over twice the size of the old.

Rosecrans in the present century remains a small outpost of civilization between its two small village signs off modern Route 477. Businesses in the "greater" Rosecrans area include Hillside Variety (advertising "We Don't Have Everything But You Could Find Anything") and the Ice Cream And More Shop (advertising as "The Sweetest Place In Town") about a mile south off Route 477 just before Interstate 80 (where there also is a BP gas station).

Three interesting nature areas exist around Rosecrans. One is the Rosecrans Water Falls, located just north of the hamlet at the east end of Spring Run Road. Locals are very proud of the gem of a spot in the woods.

Second, just south of the falls, is the Warren H. Ohl (also known as the McElhattan, Rosecrans or Jamison Run) Reservoir, which is maintained by the City of Lock Haven as its primary water supply. McElhattan Creek (Run) flows north from it.

The site of the reservoir used to be part of Turbin Seyler's large farm. Seyler and his wife were charter members of the Pilgrim of Holiness Church in 1939.

The third is the Rosecrans Bog Natural Area, northeast of the village. In Bald Eagle State Forest, the small, non-glacial bog offers visitors sightings of wild fowl, including ducks, hawks, even great blue herons, deer, beavers and lots of cow lilies. The beaver dams have flooded the original sphagnum moss mats and the timber.

Rosecrans, 1,700 feet above sea level, once a mountaintop stop on the 1800s stage route between Lock Haven and Logansville (Loganton), offers its residents and visitors a haven of calm in our fast-moving, hectic world.

SOURCES: (1) John Blair Linn's 1883 book, "History of Centre and Clinton Counties, Pennsylvania," (2) the 1965 "125th Anniversary of Loganton and Sugar Valley" booklet, (3) the 1976 10th-grade Sugar Valley High School class's "Country Pride I" booklet, (4) the 1989 Clinton County Sesquicentennial book, "Clinton County: A Journey Through Time," and (5) Steve Weaver's recollections (as a great-grandson of George Wagner), as recorded by local historian Harlan Berger in the March 2006 issue of "The Millmont Times."

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