

WE WANTED TO BE CALLED GREEN EYES

Written by Helen Collins Selman

In the early 1900's a drummer walked into Smith's Store in southwest Campbell County and asked the directions to Rico. Mr. Calvin Smith was among the group sitting around the potbellied stove in the store. "You are standing in the middle of it right now. If you take a step in any direction you will be out of it," answered Calvin.

Today the name Rico is used to refer to the entire southwest tip of Fulton County.

Actually, Rico was a latecomer in the Campbell County settlements along the Chattahoochee River. John Henley Varner became the first postmaster of County Line on July 27, 1830, according to post office records, thus establishing the community of County Line, Georgia. According to Varner family letters in the possession of Mrs. Mabel Mansfield, John Henley came into possession of his land lots in 1826. The letters indicate that he found many fine trees, Indians, and suitable land to be cleared for cattle, corn and cotton. In his later accounting books many names of neighbors appear such as Bryant, B. D. Smith, R. D. Zellars, Westers, Andy Bryans, Wesley Dunkin, Andy Thompson, James Abercrombie, Berry Lassetter, Jack Tubbyfield, the potter who lived on the land, R. M. Christopher, Jack Lambert, William Brooks and many others.

As County Line was developing into a flourishing community, settlers were clearing land to the north. Piney Woods Primitive Baptist Church was built on Kite Road in the early 1800's. It was a one-room log cabin. Early settlers buried in the Piney Woods Cemetery near the church included the Ballards, Smiths, Yates, Lovelaces, Barfields, Burans, Garretts and others. On one side of the burial ground are the graves of the Negro slaves of these families. In 1852 the new church, now called Providence, was built on land deeded by Mrs. Buran. In later years Mr. Jewett Shannon deeded a total of one acre of land to be used as a community cemetery. The first Sunday School was organized in 1856. One of the most famous ministers of the church was M. D. Collins who later became Dr. M. D. Collins, superintendent of schools for the State of Georgia.

Rico Methodist Church had its origin in cottage meetings with the pastor from Palmetto, New Hope and Liberty Hill Methodist Church located on Rivertown Road. Reverend Frank Quillian found that most of the members at Liberty Hill actually lived in Rico. The district Methodist Conference in June 1902 granted Reverend Quillian permission to organize a church at Rico. Mr. J. W. Shannon, a member at Liberty Hill, donated one acre of land adjoining the Baptist Church property for the church building. He thought the two churches should harmonize and cooperate and be as one on earth as well as in heaven.

In his history of Rico Methodist Church, Mr. R. A. Mixon lists many individuals and businesses who donated labor and materials to build the church. The one big brass lamp hung in the middle of the church came from the old Liberty Hill Church. The bell in the belfry also came from Liberty Hill to Rico about 25 years later.

Rico Methodist Church was debt-free when it was dedicated on May 3, 1903 and has been ever since. Mr. Mixon's account says, "Now 50 years later, it has been said, that there is no other place on earth where the Methodist and Baptist cooperate as well as they do at Rico Methodist and Providence Baptist."

According to Mr. Henry Barnes, Jim McMillan probably built the house where he and Mrs. Barnes now live. It is thought that he built the store which later became the Masonic Lodge and is now the Rico Civic Center. The store became the community gathering place and was referred to as "Green Eyes" because of the color of the windows in the setting sun. In 1889 the owners of the store applied for a post office in the name of "Green Eyes." However, the Postal authorities wrote back that there was already one Green Eyes post office in Georgia. The postal authorities substituted the name Rico for Green Eyes and the community has been known as Rico ever since. Legend has it that none of the adult men wanted their names to go to Washington as postmaster. Someone suggested sending in Geatie's name. Little Geatie Tanner was five years old at the time. He remained postmaster, at least in name, from 1889 until 1894.

Dr. Carmical, the first doctor in Rico, built the house where Jack Lester now lives.

Dr. Sewell lived in the Henry Barnes home for a time. His doctor's office was a one-room building up near the road. That building has since been moved back away from the road and has had a shed added to it. It is still standing. In later years Dr. Snead lived in the Barnes home and practiced medicine.

Dr. John Morrow was Rico's first dentist. He would go to the home to work on teeth. He had a portable drill which he carried with him. He operated this drill by pedaling with his feet.

The first school was located where the Baptist Church now stands. When the school caught fire the teacher sent George Greene to Geat Herndon's store to borrow a bucket. Mr. Herndon had a customer so George waited until Mr. Herndon asked what he wanted. The school house burned down.

The next school house was built across the street from the present Methodist Church and was used until 1932. There was no water available in this school. At recess one student would go to the church and bring back a bucket of water for the children.

Everyone drank from the same dipper.

Some of the early teachers were Mrs. Charlie Sewell, Mrs. Newt Skeen, Mr. Chester Adams (who was also a Baptist preacher), Miss Emma Luck, Miss Tessie Smith and Mr. Claude Landrum.

Mr. Wilson A. Adams built the present John Smith's store and ran it until he went bankrupt. Burnett Smith bought him out and the store has been run by a Smith ever since.

Claude Langley built a store next door to the Buran-Shannon house and ran it for a short while. Roy Barnes bought and ran the store until his death in 1978.

Three miles north of Rico was located a flourishing little settlement called Rivertown. On the corner of Campbellton-Redwine Road and Rivertown Road, Mr. John Yates built a two story brick home which still stands today. The first post office was opened in Rivertown in 1832 with Mr. Joseph N. Spencer as postmaster on land owned by the Tillman Yates family.

1894, John Jethro Peter Jones bought the Yates house and property at a sheriff's sale. He continued to run the general store and later built a cotton gin and grist mill that furnished electricity for the house.

Rivertown was a flourishing community in the early 1900's. Jones' son Joseph A. Jones (Joe) bought the house and raised his family there.

Mrs. Carl Crouch (Willie Jones) says that every noon her mother would ring the dinner bell and everyone in the store at the time would come to dinner. Willie remembers Mr. Smith, a drummer, who always managed to arrive at Rivertown late in the afternoon so he could spend the night.

Joe Jones advertised his store with dishes with the following printed on it:

***"You may go east, You may go west
When you pass my store, You pass the best."
J.A. Jones & Sons General Merchandise
Rivertown, Georgia***

Among the other residents of the Rivertown area were the Collins, Camps, Mose Smith, Garretts, Loveless, Grizzards, Yates, Cochrans, and many others.

Today, all that remains at Rivertown is the beautiful old Jones home.

Mr. John Smith, descendant of several generations of Rico residents, says "that the main difference he sees in Rico of yesteryear and today is that there are not as many people here today."

About the Writer Helen Selman

By Ken Langley

Helen Selman was a long time Rico resident. Her article, "We Wanted to Be Called Green Eyes", published in the December 1984 edition of the Palmetto Recorder, is probably the best written history of the Rico area available today.

Helen Collins Bomar Selman Hudson was the oldest daughter of Vivian and Sadie Collins. They lived near the intersection of Jones Fy. and Campbellton-Redwine roads after moving there from Douglasville. She married James Bomar in 1938 and was widowed upon his death in 1947. She later married Bill Selman who died in 1972. Helen married Leon Hudson in 1996 and died April 9, 2003 at the age of 85. For twelve years she was a 7th grade teacher in Palmetto at the old Riley Elementary School followed by 21 years as an elementary school principal in East Point and Fairburn. After retirement, she served six terms (1982-1993) representing the south Fulton area in the Georgia House of Representatives.

Her long and dedicated involvement with the Rico Civic Club probably led Helen to write "We Wanted to Be Called Green Eyes" to preserve the interesting heritage of the community.

Most of the above information was obtained from House Resolutions 775 and 841, passed by the House of Representatives in 2003, honoring Helen's dedication and service to her community and state.