

## **Slocomb's Railroad Station Center of Social Life**

The history of Slocomb should begin with its growth within the last few years and then go back into its earlier days.

Within the past few years, the town has organized a bi-racial Citizens Advisory Council to plan the improvements needed by the town and then to devise a way to secure these improvements.

As a result, the town of Slocomb now has a new municipal building, a sewer lagoon and disposal plant, a new water system and storage tank, a stream channel improvement project which has drained and reclaimed 220 acres of residential and business property.

The town has a new industry, a new bank building, 14 low-rent housing units, two farmers' markets for fresh produce which this year did a total volume in business of nearly a million dollars.

The town is now working on the development of a recreational area, and planning the construction of a sanitary land fill for the town dump.

Mayor Lawrence Harris gives the credit for the growth and improvement of Slocomb to the Wiregrass Resource Conservation and Development Project, approved in 1967 by the Department of Agriculture. This group, sponsored by the County Commissioners from Geneva County and eight other counties, and by Conservation District Supervisors in those nine counties works to develop resources in the area.

Slocomb is located in east Geneva County and has a population of about 2,000 people in the 20 square mile area surrounding the town. The population of the town is about 1500.

The town was chartered in 1901 and early history says it was settled by Frank Slocomb and his brother Will, in 1898. The brothers set up a turpentine still about two miles from town.

Then when the Central of Ga. railroad extended its lines from Albany, Ga. to Florala, it came through Slocomb. The Slocomb brothers moved their turpentine operation to Slocomb.

Early industry in the town included turpentine, cross ties and lumber. According to a history of the town, written by William Rigell of Johnson City, Tenn., Doc Anthony was chief of the cross tie business, Morris Lumber Co. controlled the saw mill and the Slocomb brothers ran the turpentine business.

Rigell said that for a short while, there were two liquor stores in town where a pint of gin, or apple, banana, peach or apricot brandy could be bought for 25 cents.

The social life, Rigell said, revolved around the church. Everybody in town went to church on Sundays and on Wed. nights. That's where all the young men met their favorite young ladies and escorted them home, walking or riding in buggies.

But there was another social center in Slocomb, and that was the railway station. At four o'clock every Sunday afternoon the "Lightening Express" went north. And the whole town gathered there to see the crack special go by. The "crack, special" consisted of an engine, baggage coach, and two passenger cars.

Growing along with the town during these years were the churches. The Methodist, Baptist and Primitive Baptist Churches have led the growth. Both the Methodist and Baptist originated from a community Sunday School which was held in an old school house. As the members grew, the congregation divided and built separate buildings.

Rigell wrote that the first Sunday school was held soon after the city was founded and that it met in a "well ventilated" guano warehouse, across the railroad from the depot. Later the union Sunday school was transferred to the wooden school house in the square.

Slocomb's first school was opened in 1901. Miss Opie Langston was the first teacher, according to J.J. Collins.

In his history of the schools in Slocomb, Collins reports that in 1904, a wooden building was built on the public square and N.B. Hughes was the first principal.

By 1908, Collins says, the only extra curricular activity in the school was a debating society which met to debate twice a week. All students were required to take elocution and Latin.

Collins also reports that the first class to graduate at Slocomb High School was in 1901. There were two members of the class ~ Louise McCarthey and Lennie Smith.

Slocomb schools have had their share of the dark days, Collins reported in his history. In 1925, a two story brick building, built in 1908, burned to the ground. It was rebuilt, but three years later, C.F. Avant, principal, was murdered in the high school library one night. His murderers were never brought to justice.

In 1948, William Rigell wrote "practical progress looms before every eye that is now laid on Slocomb...there are prosperous merchants, serviceable drug stores, and the Slocomb National Bank which has been a fat and healthy baby since the day it was born. All of these are tucked away in the history of Slocomb."

But then Rigell asks, "But is that all?" And then he answers his own question by saying, "no town consists entirely of streets and avenues, Industries and stores, lots and lands. The people are the community."

And the people of Slocomb, it would seem this December of 1968, are well on their way to more of Rigell's "practical progress" — it "looms before every eye."

Slocomb's mayor is Lawrance Harris. Town Clerk is Mrs. Hilda Williams, Attorney, Charles R. Paul. Councilmen are C.M. Hidle, Paul Snipes, mayor pro-tem; HermanSmith, Max Foster, and Huey Helms.