

ASHFORD - WEST VALLEY

Located thirty-five miles south of Buffalo, New York, in scenic Cattaraugus County, West Valley is the largest hamlet in the 33,204 acre town of Ashford. The quiet streets, small locally-owned businesses, and active service organizations are all part of West Valley's friendly small-town atmosphere.

Henry Frank, a former Revolutionary War scout, is thought to have been the first settler in the area which became the town of Ashford in 1824. West Valley was named in honor of George West, an early Ashford Town Supervisor and later a New York State Assemblyman. While Ashford Hollow was the site of the township's first saw mill in 1826 and first grist mill in 1833, the first Post Office opened in West Valley in 1839.

An 1879 historical excerpt states that, "West Valley is situated in the southeast corner



Air view of West Valley.



Depot Street in West Valley.

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Historian Bud Williams and President Diane Pfeffer.*

of the town, in the valley of the Buttermilk Creek, and contains two churches (Free-Will Baptist and German Methodist), dry-goods store, post office, schoolhouse, hardware and tin shop, clothing store, feed store and grocery, three blacksmith shops, steam saw mill, and tannery and saw mill. This valley is from half to three-quarters of a mile in width, and a great variety of productions is said to excel any locality in the County. Much attention is given to the cultivation of apples, pears, peaches, and small fruits. Riceville, early know as East Ashford is situated on Buttermilk Creek, about two and half miles north of West Valley, and contains two churches (Methodist and Union), post office, store, schoolhouse, blacksmith shop and saw mill."

In the early days wolves and wildcats which ran at large caused considerable damage to farm animals. Bounties were paid by the town for their destruction.

In 1829, land being bought in West Valley from the Holland Land Company was found to



Early scene of West Valley, New York.

be mostly woods and most of the people settled on the hills because they were afraid the swampy lowlands would not be healthy. The roads were nearly all along the hills. Traces of these hill roads could still be found in places in 1914.

The people obtained information from the outside world through the mail and stagecoach. The stagecoach was driven from Buffalo to Ellicottville until the B.R. and P. railroad was put through in 1883. The mailman carried the mail twice a week on horseback from Springville to Ashford. Riceville had a mail service from Cattaraugus Station quite a number of years before

the West Valley post office was established, and once a week someone went to Riceville for mail. There were few letters received then. Two weekly papers, the Toledo Blade and Horace Greeley's New York Tribune were "bringers" of the news. During the Civil War the Tribune was the dependable newspaper and the men gathered in George West's store to hear someone read the war news.

A well-known name in West Valley business was A.O. Tillinghast, who ran a store that sold a wide variety of items. He also sold insurance. This well known building (it leaned to one side) stood for many years until its demise in the 1970s. Other early West Valley names are Waite, Chamberlain, Holland, Babcock, Murphy, Bernhoft, Aldrow, Willis, Dill, Klein and Dole.

Farming was the mainstay until the early 1960s. Today only a handful of farms are still functioning. Other than the school and nuclear plant, residents commute to their jobs outside of West Valley.

The first church to be built was the Evangelical. This was about 1870. There was trouble of some kind and the Baptist Church was organized in 1873. Then there was trouble between the Baptists, and the Methodists were organized. The Roman Catholics and the Adventists were not organized until 1883.



Hotel in Ashford.



Main Street in Ashford Hollow.

“ *Seth Allen came in the winter of 1822 and built the first grocery store in Ashford Hollow. He later built a log ashery and made pearlash.* ”

Providing a quality education for the area's youth has always been a priority. As far as is known, a log cabin served as the first school. West Valley's first grammar school opened its doors in 1839 and the first high school graduation was held in 1912. Today West Valley Central School is a focus of community activity with students attending grades kindergarten through twelve. Business First Magazine has designated West Valley Central first in Cattaraugus County.

West Valley is the home of the West Valley Demonstration Project, a former nuclear re-processing plan. It is currently undergoing final stages of clean-up and decontamination.

*Compiled from various historical sources
by Diane M. Pfeffer, Ashford Historical Society*



Cheese Factory in Ashford Hollow.



Early scene of Main Street in Ashford.

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*William Rice built a sawmill at East Ashford.
The settlement was named Riceville in his honor.*

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ASHFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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Hours:

2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. last Sunday
of the Month from May to September
or by appointment

History: West Valley once boasted "a post office, schoolhouse, hardware and tin shop, clothing, store, feed store, grocery, three blacksmith shops, steam saw mill and tannery. This valley is said to excel any locality in the county for the great variety of productions. Much attention is given to the cultivation of apples, pears, peaches and small fruits." Taken from The History of Cattaraugus County.

Exhibits and Files: Blacksmith Shop Exhibit, Tillinghast Family General Store, personal items, West Valley School items, photos and yearbooks.

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A major factor in the development of the town of Ashford was the creation of a nuclear fuel reprocessing center in 1963. Ashford is also the home of the Griffith Sculpture Park.

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