



The elevated water tank at Franklin and Lawrence streets, Rockingham, is a Hamlet antique that keeps on working.

Hamlet company becomes leader in field in South

Written by R.C. Historical Society

In the heart of Rockingham is a reminder of the impact of a Hamlet company throughout the area.

An elevated water tower was erected at the corner of Franklin and Lawrence streets by the Hamlet Water Company after it was formed in 1908 by William Roscoe Bonsal and four other Prominent Hamlet citizens. The tower is one of the oldest commercial structures remaining in Rockingham still being used in its original function.

"W. R. Bonsal and Associates Help Develop Sandhills" was a headline in a 1932 Spirit of Richmond publication.

The business began in early 1900 and continues today. The Hamlet Water Company provided water to Rockingham until the city developed its own water system.

W. R. Bonsal and Obadiah Lewis Cloud Jr. were two of the many entrepreneurs attracted to Hamlet in the late 1800s involving the

railroad. With a 50-50 partnership, Bonsal and Cloud became involved in multiple enterprises.

The need for railroad ballast (rocks for the beds of railroad tracks) was one of the major reasons for the Bonsal Company to begin operations in Hamlet.

From that early operation in Hamlet, Bonsal Company expanded throughout the South.

Today's company profile says, "In 1895, the W. R. Bonsal Company began as a supplier and contractor for the railroad industry in the South. Over the years, the Company has evolved into a leading manufacturer and marketer of building products for residential and commercial construction and is one of the largest quartzite aggregate producers in the South."

Hamlet purchased the Hamlet Water Company from the Bonsal Co. in 1968 for \$850,000.

The water company was headquartered in the Seaboard Hotel, which, with partners, Bonsal also owned.

One of their early contracts around 1907 was to furnish components for construction of Blewett Falls Dam. S.O. Bauersfeld of Hamlet, company secretary/treasurer, was also involved. They produced washed gravel and stone for concrete work as well as rock for the government jetties at Southport and elsewhere. Bonsal started a company near Lilesville in Anson County to mine ballast. It is still in operation and visible from U.S. 74 west.

In addition, they had a timber, railroad crosstie, railroad switches and telegraph pole business. It was said that the company was born through diversification. At one time they formed at least two railroad companies of their own.

Diversification included Bonsal designing the 1912 All Saints Episcopal Church, Hamlet, where he was first warden, and supervising its construction. He built his house, known now as Rye Fields which he designed ca. 1900.

In 1962, Bonsal moved from Hamlet to Lilesville where it was operating its ballast pits.

It is still carrying out its early tradition of diversification of materials in combination with many subsidiaries.