

ELVERTON STATION

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Lawrence J. Fleenor, Jr.

Big Stone Gap, Virginia

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That section of Powell's Valley east of the Town of Big Stone Gap, Virginia was not conceptualized as being a single community until the early Twentieth Century. It was well settled, and had churches, schools, and localities within it, but was not viewed as a 'place' in its own right until after the coming of the South Atlantic and Ohio Railroad (SA&O) in 1890.^(1, 2) That railroad ran from Bristol, Virginia to Appalachia, Virginia, and was designed to open up the coal fields of that region. The railroad set a depot where it intersected with roads running in several directions up and down the valley. It needed a name for that depot, and as no community existed it chose one that met the promotional mindset of its developers – East Stone Gap.^(2 pg. 102) In the next decade or so the East Big Stone Gap Development Corp. was formed (the documentation of the date is unknown, but deeds on file in the Wise Co. Court House document its existence), and a street grid developed, and lots sold. The East Stone Gap Post Office was opened in 1892^(1 pg. 85), and the East Stone Gap School was graduating its first class in 1918, suggesting that it had opened in about 1907 or so.⁽³⁾ The name, however, presented a problem, in that when a passenger train from Bristol approached the depot, the passengers would frequently misunderstand the conductor's announcement, and think that they had come to Big Stone Gap instead of East Stone Gap, and would disembark in error.⁽⁴⁾ By 1897 the SA&O had changed the name of its depot to "Powell"^(2 pg. 114) The post office and the developing community did not change their names. This name conflicted with Powell, Tennessee, which had been named in 1789.⁽⁵⁾ In 1899 the SA&O went through a bankruptcy reorganization and changed its name to the Virginia & Southwestern Railroad. The problematic name "Powell Station" was changed to that of the first name of one of the financiers of the V&SW, who was also on its board of directors – Elverton R. Chapman. Elverton positioned his son, Melville Douglas Chapman, to also be on the board of directors, and to be the corporate Vice President. Melville was also general manager of the Virginia Iron and Coal Company of Tom's Creek, and as such was a close associate of George L. Carter, a major stock holder of VIC, the Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio Railroad, as well as of the SA&O and the V&SW.^(2, 6, 7) So, Elverton Station was born – a name that the depot at East Stone Gap kept until the station was closed about 1950 or so.^(4 and others)

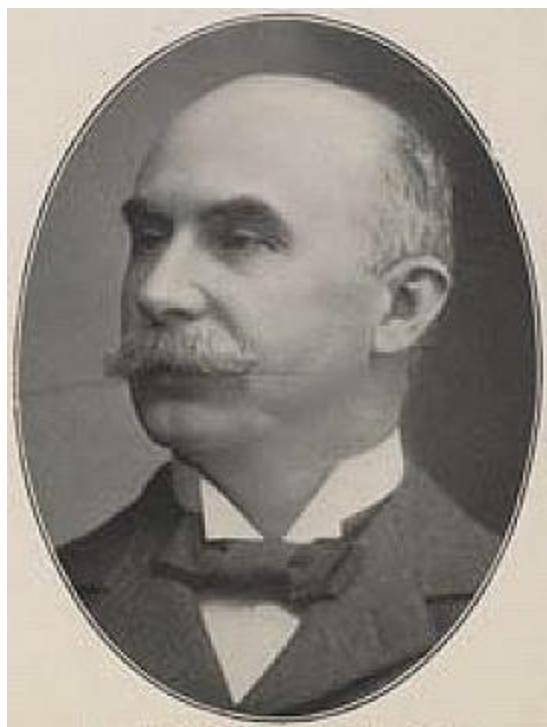
By 1904 the community of East Stone Gap had become incorporated as a town in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Its "taxable values of public service corporations" were listed as "Virginia and Southwestern R'y Co. \$12,350.00".⁽⁸⁾ "Isaac N. Jones was one of the main organizers that brought about the change in local government that made East Stone Gap a corporate village, and he was elected its first mayor".⁽⁹⁾ This status as an incorporated town was short lived, and the circumstances of its reversion to the county have not been discovered.

Elverton R. Chapman is an interesting character of national, as well as local, significance. He was born in the State of New York in 1848, and got a law degree from Columbia University. He served in the Union Army during the Civil War. He became politically active, and was appointed as Chief of the Stamp Division of the Internal Revenue Service during the corrupt Grant administration. A major portion of this agency's responsibilities was to tax and to supervise the whiskey manufacturing industry by selling tax stamps that were to be fixed on each bottle sold. In the 1870's a consortium of whiskey distillers and wholesalers formed a monopoly called the "Whiskey Ring" whose purpose was to defraud the Federal Government of its liquor tax revenues. The methodology was to corrupt the revenue agents and other officers of the Grant Administration with kickbacks. The House of Representatives formed an investigative committee, who implicated Chapman. Chapman made a vigorous counter-attack, and was exonerated, but

found it expedient to leave the government.^(10, 11) He then went into the contracting business, and then became a stockbroker and joined the law firm of Moore & Schley. This was the era of Theodore Roosevelt and his 'trust busting' agenda.⁽¹³⁾ The sugar refining and marketing industry formed a monopolistic trust generally referred to as "the Sugar Trust". Under Roosevelt's agenda, the Senate formed an investigating committee. Due to his reputation with the Whisky Trust, the Sugar Trust hired Chapman to defend it. After making a vigorous defense of the Trust, Chapman was subpoenaed by the committee to testify. Citing 'attorney - client privilege', Chapman refused to appear. In a drama reminiscent of today Chapman 'played to the galleries', and after three years of public dramatic

infighting, he submitted to prison for 30 days. He may have felt that it increased his reputation among the numerous trusts then seeking representation.^(14, 15, 16) Instead of taking this career path, he chose instead to join the corporate robber barons who were then reaping the unregulated whirlwind of industrial development. He went into the gas industry, the coal and coke industry, and into iron and steel.⁽¹²⁾ In this phase of his life he met such men as Daniel and Frank Imboden, George L. Carter, George Washington Palmer, and others associated with the industrial development of Wise Co. Indeed, these men owned the V&SW. Melville continued Elverton's involvements in corporate heavy industry all the way from Pennsylvania to Mexico. Elverton died in 1928. The passenger trains quit coming to Elverton Station in 1936, but it continued as a freight depot through World War II. The building, which was more or less behind the current East Stone Gap Post Office, was torn down in the early 1950's.

ELVERTON
R.
CHAPMAN



EAST BIG STONE GAP, VA.

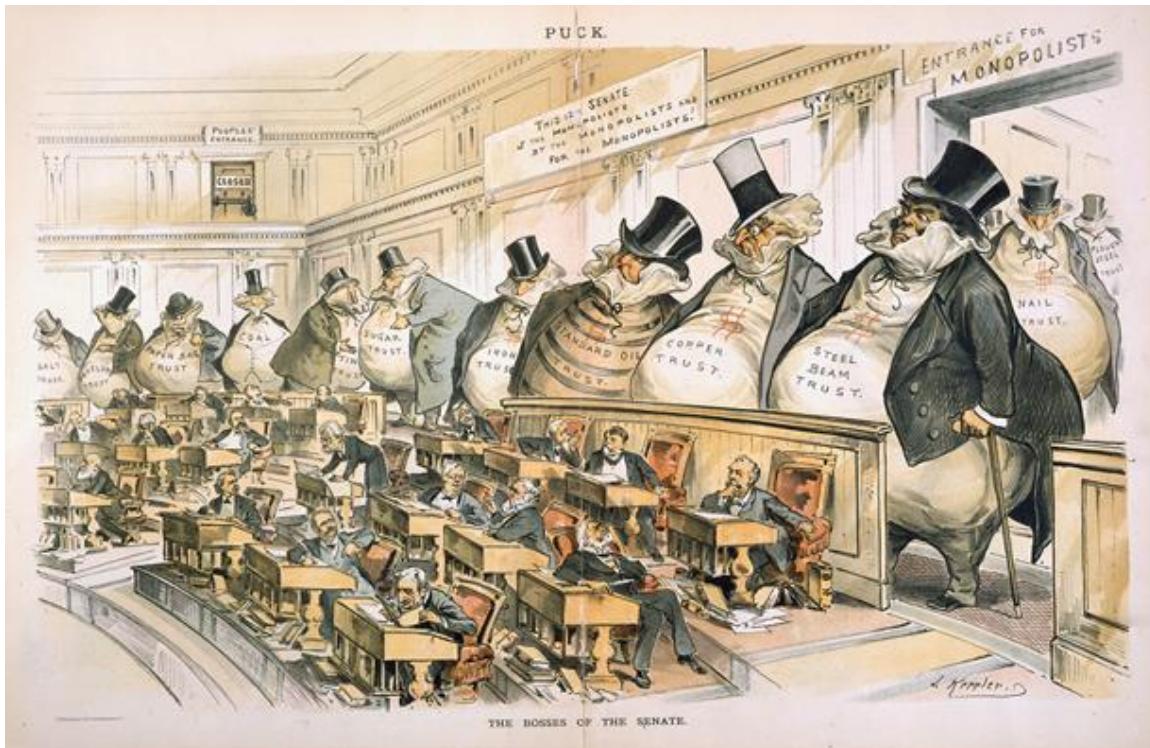
A BEAUTIFUL TOWN SITE
 —MIDWAY BETWEEN THE—

COAL FIELDS AND IRON ORES

Adjoining the City of Big Stone Gap on one side, and the South Appalachian Land Company's valuable and extensive Town Site Lands on the other.

FOR INFORMATION IN DETAIL, ADDRESS
THE EAST BIG STONE GAP LAND & IMPROVEMENT CO.
BIG STONE GAP, VA.
 J. B. F. MILLS, President, or S. C. BERRYMAN, Secretary.

FROM THE BIG STONE GAP "POST" DATE UNKNOWN – COURTESY OF ED WOLFE



A POLITICAL CARTOON PUBLISHED IN "PUCK", A BRITISH HUMOR MAGAZINE
 IN GENERAL IT PARADES THE 'TRUST' SITUATION IN THE UNITED STATES
 NOTE THE 5TH CHARACTER FROM THE LEFT
 IE. – "THE SUGAR TRUST" (GOOGLE IMAGES)

1898 TRAIN SCHEDULE

NOTE THAT THE DEPOT AT EAST STONE
GAP IS NOW BEING CALLED
'POWELLS'

NOTE THAT THE SA&O IS IN RECEIVERSHIP (BANKRUPTCY)

(2)

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Schedule Change

1938 TRAIN SCHEDULE

NOTE THAT THE SOUTHERN RR HAD OWNERSHIP
OF THE FORMER SA&O

NOTE THAT THE DEPOT AT EAST STONE GAP
IS NOW CALLED 'ELVERTON'

ALSO NOTE THAT THE TIME USED WAS CENTRAL TIME. THIS WAS BECAUSE THE LINE DIVIDING EASTERN TIME FROM CENTRAL TIME AT THAT ERA LAY BETWEEN APPALACHIA AND NORTON. THE N&W CONNECTING WITH THE INTERSTATE AT NORTON, AND WITH THE SOUTHERN AT BRISTOL WAS ON EASTERN TIME, WHILE THE SOUTHERN WEST OF THESE PLACES OPERATED ON CENTRAL. IT WAS EASIER FOR THE SOUTHERN TO KEEP ITS APPALACHIA DIVISION OPERATING ON CENTRAL TIME. WISE COUNTY FUNCTIONED ON EASTERN. THROUGH WORLD WAR II TRAINMEN IN APPALACHIA KEPT TWO CLOCKS ON THEIR MANTLES - ONE SET ON 'RAILROAD TIME' (CENTRAL), AND ONE ON EASTERN IN COORDINATION WITH EVERYTHING ELSE (FROM THE AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE)



EXCERPT FOR THE 1935 USGS 7.5
MINUTE TOPOGRAPHIC MAP, EAST STONE
GAP QUADRANGLE

NOTE THE SIDE TRACK ACCOMMODATING
THE
ELVERTON DEPOT
AND THE CARTOGRAPHER'S LABELLING
THE MAP WITH BOTH THE NAMES
'EAST STONE GAP' AND
'ELVERTON STATION'

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4 – Gembash, Jack – oral communication to the author

5 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Powell,_Tennessee

6 - <https://househistree.com/people/melville-douglas-chapman>

7 - Elverton R. Chapman – one of the incorporators of the V&SW RR

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