

*Editor's Note: This is the second in a two-part story about Wilson Brown and his big house named "Rago."*

Rago, which was located in what is now the Metfield area of Bella Vista, became a popular community gathering place in the early 1900's. Wilson Brown sold goods at his store and made deliveries of produce, milk and eggs by truck to the nearby Lake Bella Vista resort and as far away as Oklahoma. He gradually increased his acreage to between 1300 and 1400 acres, not all contiguous, mortgaging it with the St. Louis Federal Land Bank (which was created by the Federal Farm Loan Act of 1916 to provide long term mortgage credit to individual farmers and their families). It was a total family operation...Mrs. Brown and the children worked long hours alongside him. They had a large vineyard and bottled their own wine. From their large orchards of pear, peach and apple trees, they produced fruit and apple butter in glass jars, and they had an evaporator building where they dried apples. They bottled catsup in glass jars, produced tinned cans of tomatoes under the "Oh Yes" brand, and sold honey from the many beehives. In later years, Brown also operated a saw mill. A spring on the property provided water. Behind the house was a small silica mine, where the white powder-like sand was extracted for polishing tableware and jewelry.

Brown had only fourteen years left on his mortgage when the St. Louis bank foreclosed on his property in the summer of 1938, after ill health had forced him to quit working. His children were married and starting families of their own by then, and none had money to spare at that time to help out their father. One of his daughters had previously bought the nearby Myers place and he moved there, but died a few months later. The newspaper announcement of Brown's death of March 12, 1939, read in part, "A pioneer grower of grapes and other fruits in this region, he also was a manufacturer of native wines and was active in the early horticultural development in Arkansas." In addition to being a postmaster, businessman, and horticulturalist, he was appointed surveyor and was elected for three succeeding terms, but was unable to take office after the last election because of his illness. Brown's work as a surveyor included helping the Linebarger brothers lay out Old Bella Vista. He had also ran unsuccessfully for state senate in 1914.

Eventually C.A. Linebarger, expanding his interests beyond the Lake Bella Vista resort, bought the Rago property. He later sold it to Arthur and Veneta Townsend, who in turn sold it to Cooper Communities.

The end of Rago began when vandals took a bulldozer from the nearby Metfield Recreation Center, under construction at the time, on April 4, 1975, and partially pushed down the porches. The house had stood vacant for several years and interest had been expressed in turning it and the surrounding five acres into a historical park, but instead it was destroyed on May 31, 1976, in a fire set by an arsonist. Wilson Brown and his wife Ava, who outlived him by six years, were buried in Dug Hill Cemetery, located up behind the little church on Highway 71 just south of Bella Vista's Town Center.

