Barrydale

Contributed by SJ du Toit

When Barrydale was founded on the farms Tradouw’s Hoek and Moerasrivier, in 1882, a trading store and church already existed. These had been built by the Barry family for farms in the area.

Joseph Barry (1796-1865) founded a vast trading empire in Swellendam, the Overberg and Little Karoo. He not only enriched his family, but also the entire farming community. In those days, journeys to Cape Town were hazardous and time-consuming, so Joseph Barry had the bright idea to send produce by ship. He bought a steamship, which could transport goods right up to and from Malgas on the Breede River, close to Swellendam. Later when economic and depression stress forced the Barrys to their knees, the shop doors closed. They were bankrupt and so was the whole of the Overberg.

But they survived and the next generation Barrys founded the village and named it Barrydale after Joseph Barry. Barrydale is the gateway to the Little Karoo, either by way of Tradouw Pass or from Montagu. The village is surrounded by the Langeberg and Warmwatersberg mountains. Residents experience peace and tranquillity all year round. The Anna Le Roux Wildflower Garden lies outside the village and masses of the colourful mesembryanthemum (vygies) are enjoyed in spring.

The old church was built in 1877 and the present one in 1905 at the cost of £5 371. The first school was built in 1885. One of the well-known teachers was Miss Mersey Steyn. She married one of the local Fullards. In 1920 the Bellair dam was built in the Waterberg. This dam broke its banks during the 2003 flood.

Barrydale obtained municipal status in 1921. Early houses were town houses (“tuishuise”), built by farmers to stay in when attending nagmaal (holy communion). Today, some of these houses are restored and used as guest-houses. Barrydale also boasts fine restaurants and a busy tourism bureau.

A large deciduous fruit industry operates in the area. Masses of fresh fruit from the valley reach overseas and local markets. Barrydale is also a large supplier of dried fruit. Fruit time is a festive time. White and pink blossoms turn the area into a colourful spectacle. Barrydale Co-operative and Wine Producers has a big cellar where the district’s wines are produced.

Many artists and creative people have made Barrydale their home. Max du Preez, Anne Harris, Anne Wevell, Ross Devenish and Wilbur Smith are some of them. Phyllis Spira (ballerina), and dancers Philip Boyd and Linda Hewitt (Smit) made Barrydale their place in which to relax. Barrydale also produced some stars in the sporting field.

This story was originally published in "The Overberg - Historical Anecdotes", written by SJ du Toit. The book is available from bookshops and tourism bureaux in the Overberg or from the author:
Huis Lettie Theron, Private Bag X03, Hermanus, 7200
Tel: +27 (0)28-313 2031