

The Story of Fallingwater

Based on the Original Café Exhibition by Edgar Kauffman, jr. and Donald Hoffman

Before Fallingwater

Bear Run, the name given to the stream that flows beneath Fallingwater, once supported a small mountain community typical of small settlements in the Laurel Highlands region of western Pennsylvania. Once the site of Monongahela Indian settlements, and later the hunting grounds of the Iroquois, the region was explored by George Washington as part of his search for river transportation to the head of the Ohio River. After the French and Indian War, people of varied European origins began to settle along the rivers and trails of the mountain district, drawn by timber and dense stone (both could be sold and transported), by game and fish, water for milling, clay for pots and bricks, and warm pelts. Subsistence farming began despite poor soil.

By mid-19th century, technology changed this pattern of life. Coal mining, coke ovens, and railroads became dominant factors; logging now supplied railway ties and mine posts. The best trees and coal were used up and local families sought alternative means of livelihood. Where Bear Run meets the Youghiogheny River, a small community grew and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad stopped there twice a day. A general store stood near the station. Ice was harvested upstream and floated down to the river for sale. A sawmill and a tram road moved logs and lumber; there was a smithy and a slaughterhouse, all located and occasionally relocated along Bear Run. Nearby were clay and coalmines and charcoal hearths.

At nearby Ohiopyle along the Youghiogheny River, a summer resort drew visitors from far and near, all looking for a chance to get back to nature

in a beautiful mountain setting. Out of that traffic arose the interest of a Masonic group in the area, and in 1890, a Masonic Country Club became established up Bear Run beyond the station stop community. The Masons naturally built their clubhouse and some family cottages along the streamside road, and they bought more land five years later.



Ten years later, the property had to be sold, passing through various hands until in 1909, it was bought by another Masonic group who built a large clubhouse and more cottages farther from the stream to the east.

The little community at the Youghiogheny thinned out, and a school and church were built along the country road that became Route 381. Automobiles were eroding the importance of the railways. By 1913, the State of Pennsylvania enacted a highway program, and thanks to determined efforts by local taxpayers, the section of road that crosses Bear Run was finally paved in 1930. That inaugurated many changes in the life of the district.