On November 17, 1957, workers at Kaiser Aluminum in Ravenswood produced the first aluminum in West Virginia's Ohio Valley.

CSO: SS.8.6, SS.8.7, SS.8.8, SS.8.9, SS.8.14, ELA.8.1


1. Ravenswood is located _______ miles south of Parkersburg and _______ miles north of Huntington.

2. The “$5 Banquet” was not only vital to funding school activities, but incidentally provided the opportunity for the citizens of Ravenswood to impress upon the governor the dire need to complete what missing link to the community?

3. The decision to build the Kaiser Aluminum plant in Ravenswood dramatically transformed the community forever. The _________ production workers and ______________ construction workers would multiply the Ravenswood population by a staggering ____________ times the original size of the community. What improvements were forced upon the community as a result of the dramatic increase in population?

4. What state-of-the-art facility did Kaiser Aluminum build and lease to the town for $1 per year?

Think Critically: The 1950s was largely a decade of prosperity for many Americans, including those living in Ravenswood. Evaluate Ravenswood’s role in the global economy as it relates to national/international business and trade. What potential uses does aluminum have in the marketplace? Describe the transformation that Ravenswood underwent because of the Kaiser Aluminum plant.
LOOK HOMeward, ANgEL

“In the state that you can build, the young man of today need not go else-
where to seek his fame and his fortune...”

In 1811, state poet John C. White of West Virginia saw his dream come true. He moved to a farm near Wheeling and wrote the following description of Ravenswood:

Ravenswood, the largest town in Jackson County, is situated on the Ohio River at the mouth of Parthenia Creek, 16 miles south of Parkersburg and 60 miles north of Wheeling. It is situated on the second terrace of the Ohio River and is therefore protected from the floods. The town is named for the ravens which were once owned by George Washington. The town had a population of 1,000 in 1874 and in 1901 of 1,900.

There were located here an excellent high school, six churches, a smoking factory, fifteen stores, three hotels, and two building and loan associations. It deserves a portion of its support from the residents, but the larger portion is derived from the agricultural products.

As late as 1861—forty years that transformed most of the rest of the United States—the only town that would really have been described as a city was Jackson County, with a population of 2,175 and neighboring Ripley, county seat. In 1901, Ravenswood and Ripley had run counter to the fifty-year-old trend in Jackson County, whose population of 20,000 had shrunk to 12,600 by 1901.

What had happened was that Ravenswood had been isolated from the main current of American economic growth by a paucity of shingles completely outside the control of the people who lived there. Established as a river shipping point before the turn of the century, it had been founded in 1780, incorporated in 1802. The town was built for the Ohio River traffic and, although it has no other industries, the store of the old days was replaced by a modern industrial center. The town is now a bustling place with a population of 3,000, and it is still a thriving center of commerce.

SUMMER 1958
Picture evidence from the "new" Ravenswood...

In August, 1956, the lightning struck Headlines in Ohio papered up and down the valley which claimed that Kaiser Aluminum had pulled a spectacular seven miles from Ravenswood for a new strip mill and rolling mill. It would employ 300 persons—five times the current Industrial employment in Ravenswood. With their families, the workers would move to the town's population. Coffee grew mild in the cups at Happy's as the townpeople argued and speculated what it might mean.

For the Ravenswood postmaster, it wasn't sitting more mailboxes, there was no home delivery for mail; for the town's banker it meant declining his establishment; he added another loan to the one he had. For people there weren't any—no one to the room, it meant possible employment, the town's unemployment would end because the process for building the plant. Most of all it meant opportunity for Ravenswood's younger people to find jobs closer to home.

And with the opportunity, some problems. How would all these people live? There were less than 50 suitable houses in the town and 10 of those jobs chanced. Where would the children go to school?

Figures available from government spokesmen were shock. For every 300 new workers coming in, there would be 51 school children. For every 301 permanent employees, 76 new business employees would be needed. For every 76 new business employers—30 new school children.

In Oakland, California, executive headquarters for Kaiser Aluminum, and in Chicago, where the general sales offices were located, most city-born and city-reared, looked the Ravenswood list pondering the same problems. They looked over the list, and the final list in the light was completed as a tenure.

So, Ravenswood was not entirely unknown to the outside world. It had shown it was waiting and able to do things for itself, if only given an opportunity. Perhaps someone would notice...
of schools and shopping centers, recommended certain areas suitable for large-scale development of low-cost housing and provided for parks and recreation areas. The West "General Plan" was approved by the Planning Commission and the City Council, after the revised public hearings, and the zoning ordinance presently passed by the Council was based on the general plan.

The growth occasioned by the coming of Kaiser Aluminum to Ravenswood has not been unnoticed in the community itself. Fifteen miles away, Ripley is using a host of construction activity on Water Avenue on Third Street and on Robinson Heights. Neighboring communities such as Newville, just south of Ripley, Point Pleasant, southwest of Ravenswood, and at New Haven, downriver 25 miles, all show signs of new construction.

Most critical of all, this growth was to provide adequate and up-to-date elementary school facilities, remodelling of the old buildings to meet the needs of the new students. Since the school was built, with children of elementary school age. This was a problem that could not be solved with local funds, and children cannot wait. Kaiser Aluminum built a twenty-room elementary school, one of the most modern (in the field), and leased it to the community of Ravenswood for $1 per year. Schooling for other grades is expected to be provided by the community as it grows.

As for the 12,000 of the county's inhabitants that rank second to the schools in the list of the most important products of the town. A mile of 13,000, such as Ravenswood will become, contains 5,300,000 quarts of milk, 525,000 pounds of butter, 450,000 eggs, 450,000 pounds of potatoes, 300,000 pounds of fresh fruit, and 2,250,000 pounds of fresh vegetables in the year. All of these can be planted and produced on the surrounding farms.

Within the community itself, there has been a reaffirmation of community life. Weekly newspapers have been established, the size circulation and staff. A remarkable growth has occurred in the circles of the county, nearly all of which have doubled, and the Rural Home and Town Councils have been organized. The "Year-by-Year" rate of growth of Ravenswood has been slower than the population.

In the summer of 1855, Ravenswood was a town in transition, its streets as deeply deteriorated between the old and the new as if they had been set apart by a beacon, or, indeed, they were. On an early summer morning, one can walk down main street, cross the R. & O. (then daily) railroad tracks, and find something of the old tranquility. Down at the thriving asphalt-coated banks where the Ravenswood boys docks. At this time of the day, the river has its own tranquility. Nettie is liquid with song, and from across the river, the cries of farm animals float to the native. It is a good place to reflect on the change that has transformed the town.

On the main street, buildings that have been there ever since anyone can remember are being torn down and new ones are starting to go up. At night, a new street light throws net and green and yellow at the main intersection opposite the "Glass Dome," where the town's youngsters, not unlike those anywhere declined, lumbered, panting-tailed - the shadra and marsh harmonizing or, as people have said, many chimneys, their diamond lights shinning steadily from the newly installed rocking motors that line the street.

After the levee (capacity one tooth or 6 cars or 12 Volkwagens) has come and gone, a short stop up to the hills that overlook the town awhile on the white pinnacles of transition.

Below and to the left is the "old town" with its tilted streets and its quiet houses, with its church spires pointing like fingers of the sky. In the basement, beneath the hill is the warm yellow of tightly cut lumber that had like jackstones across the road to well-stacked earth - "the new town." Over there are the beginnings of a town - and then a meandering tree grew against the wind, a dog slumber in a driveway beside a station wagon, and everyone is brightly-dressed, modestly, little old, engrossed in their own form of perpetual motion. In the backyards are marble statues, with solemnities staring at the quiet river and the hills - and each other.

Far to the right, across the remains of snow-frosted fields is North (Ripley), an area of blending fields surrounded by a forest of WV Armenia rough and wooded roads reaching out across the pastures toward the west.

Purifying much of the sections, like those of new and old, are the traditional dashes of covered streets, rolling off the old and the new, and new-old. Somewhere, even, it will all be one.