History repeats; Vienna reviving

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VIENNA, La. (AP) — History does repeat itself.

In the mid-1800s, the community of Vienna (pronounced Vi-annal, just south of the Arkansas-Louisiana border, was hopping.

A stopover on the stagecoach line between Shreveport and West Monroe, the town supported 1,500 residents, two newspapers, a telegraph office, church, school, hotel, blacksmith shop, drugstore, general store and four saloons.

But in 1884, the stagecoach line died, replaced by a railroad that charged across northern Louisiana, making or breaking towns. It skipped Vienna by a scant five miles. Another city, called Ruston, sprang up around the new line, drawing away Vienna’s prosperity.

Folks in Vienna joked that the Vicksburg, Shreveport and Pacific Railroad (VS&P) stood for “Very Slow and Pokey.” But for the next 100 years, the joke was on them. Much of Vienna quietly faded, like disappearing images on old photographs.

The irony now is that folks from Ruston, population 20,000, are flocking to Vienna, to get away from city living. In the 22 years Vienna has been incorporated, the population has grown from 189 to about 1,200.

Many of those relocating are professionals, which at first gave longtime Vienna residents some pause.

“We were wondering about that, because we’re country here,” said retired Vienna Police Chief Son “Two-Gun” Frasier. “But it turns out they’re all country, too.”

Vienna seems countrified, with its quaint old-fashioned store, Vienna Grocery; the 1873 white clapboard Baptist church; and a 140-year-old cemetery.

Urban encroachment, though, is barreling toward Vienna at high speed. Traffic is almost non-stop on the nearby two-lane La. 167, which in the next decade is likely to be expanded to five lanes.