

# -----The Liberty Tree-----

By Dan Slais

In August 1999, I visited with Gary Knehans concerning a trip to the Liberty Tree in Texas County. Cecil Benson, the Plato town barber, had mentioned the tree and the following story to many of his customers, including me. The tree was located on the late Joel Hatch farm near Plato. I contacted his wife Aileen about a visit. She invited us out and sent for the property's newest owner, Hal Dandridge, to give us a tour. Aileen told us the tale and indicated the land was a prime turkey hunting area.

The following story was obtained from the Texas County Heritage and may have appeared in the Houston/Rolla daily newspapers of the past. Pictures taken in the past were difficult to reproduce. One from May 1, 1989, by Ralph Albert shows the Liberty Tree's top missing and major limbs broken from storm damage. In the Texas County Heritage, a picture shows three men measuring the circumference. Those men

included Harold Mc Laughlin, Otto McLaughlin, and Cecil Benson. All were kin to the original owner of the Liberty Tree.

The 1999 pictures shown here include a panorama of the Liberty Tree in the valley, some aspects of the tree itself, and the hill where Roubidoux and John McLaughlin were buried.

Here's the story, which was written by the late Joel Hatch shortly before his death on Aug. 30, 1976:

A large Bur Oak tree growing on the farm of Joel Hatch near Plato has been designated as a Bi-Centennial Liberty Tree by the Plato Forestry District. The tree met the qualifications of the Missouri Conservation Commission, and must be at least 200 years old. This tree is located in a valley on Roubidoux Creek in Section 14, Township 32, Range 12, about one and a half miles south of Plato. It is a majestic tree and has witnessed a lot of exciting early pioneer Texas County history. It is beautifully symmetrical and about 10 feet to the first cluster of limbs.



Although massively built, the Liberty Tree (second from left) appears of rather common proportions when viewed from a distance. The hillside to the right is where Roubidoux is believed to be buried. Courtesy of Dan Slais.

The diameter at breast height is 4 feet and 4 inches, and measures 164 inches around. The limb spread is 116 feet, and saw logs could be cut from its 12 to 20 inch branches. It is not expected, however, that this tree shall ever be cut. It seems perfectly sound

and is in a favorable location. Older residents of the community estimate the tree to be at least 300 years old, and believe it will continue to grow another 200 years or more as a living monument to those who came here before us and kindly spared its existence.

## Mid America

24 Hour ATM



EQUAL HOUSING  
LENDER

### Bank & Trust Company

VA Loans Available

"A Full Service Hometown Bank"

Serving The Community Since 1920

MEMBER  
**FDIC**

#### DRIVE-UP WINDOW:

8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mon. - Thurs.  
8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday  
8 a.m. to Noon Saturday

FULL  
SERVICE  
BANK

#### LOBBY:

8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mon. - Thurs.  
8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday  
8:30 a.m. to Noon Saturday

**Convenient Hours - Both Locations**

#### Dixon

P.O. Box 400 • 216 W. Second Street

**573-759-2121**

**Fax: 573-759-2332**

#### St. Robert

434 Highway Y • St. Robert

**573-336-7777**

**Fax: 573-336-7444**

**Fast, Friendly Professional Service. We Look Forward To Serving You!**



The 40 acres described as the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter in Section 14, where the Bur Oak is located, was first settled by John McLaughlin in 1831. His son Richard came with his father and was 6 years old at the time. The information contained in this story came partly from some historical research, but mostly from three direct descendants of Mr. John McLaughlin, the principal pioneer character. They are Mr. Otto McLaughlin (grandson of John McLaughlin) of Plato, Harold (Otto's son) also of Plato and Cecil Benson (great-great-grandson of John McLaughlin), who is the barber at Plato. Cecil Benson is the grandson of Melissa (McLaughlin) King. Melissa was the oldest daughter of Richard McLaughlin.

John McLaughlin must have found things rather quiet and peaceful in the Roubidoux valleys above Plato when he arrived in 1831. The Osage Indians had left Missouri in 1825, and the Shawnees and Delawares, the last of the Indian tribes here, were just leaving the area. The only habitation was a log cabin at the mouth of a draw, near a spring, and a small cave, in the valley where the Bur Oak was located. The occupant was a French trapper and hunter whose name was "Roubidoux."

McLaughlin and Roubidoux became friends and neighbors, living on the same 40 acres of land. They were compatible because Roubidoux wanted only to trap and hunt and thus did not interfere with Mr. McLaughlin's purpose of farming and developing his claim. McLaughlin built his cabin near a larger spring within the evening shadows of the Bur Oak tree. He came by covered wagon and had better living facilities than did Roubidoux, whose only household furniture consisted of a bed made of a stack of deer skins.

There were several in the group who came to the Roubidoux area to stake out claims, but only John McLaughlin stuck it out. In 1836, McLaughlin entered the Bur Oak 40 and another 40 acres of Section 14, with the land office in Springfield, Mo., with Cash Certificates #89 and #92 respectively. His were the first land recordings in Township 32 and no other land purchases were recorded in the upper Roubidoux for another 19 years. The two men on the Bur Oak forty looked after each other, and one cold morning, after 1831 and before 1840, McLaughlin noticed there was no smoke coming from Roubidoux's fireplace chimney.



"Tree hugging" the Liberty Tree is beyond the reach of one person. Courtesy of Dan Slais.

**DRURY**  
UNIVERSITY



*In the Fort Leonard Wood Area for  
more than 40 years!*

**573 - 329 - 4400**

*Drury University is a nationally known and accredited  
non-profit institution.*

**PCRM Comprehensive  
Breast Center**



*"Early detection leads to good health"*

- Multidisciplinary team of board-certified physicians
- Registered mammography technologist
- Nurse Practitioner - Center Coordinator
- State of the Art Equipment

**THE AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY  
RECOMMENDS AN ANNUAL SCREENING  
MAMMOGRAM BEGINNING AT AGE 40**

To schedule your mammogram call:

**573-341-5252**

1000 West Tenth Street  
Rolla, Missouri 65401

**M & S MOTORS, INC.**



Dodge Different.  
Trucks

**Phone: 573-336-3315**

**Fax: 573-336-4630**

Waynesville, Missouri 65584

**Debo and Swenson's  
Auto Service**

*"We Welcome Mike Swenson To Our Staff"*

**We Are Certified To Do  
Air Conditioner Work & Electrical Repair**

*Maintenance and Repair for Most  
American and Foreign Made Cars*

**573-774-2390**

1010 Historic Rt.66, Waynesville, MO.

**GENE'S  
PLUMBING**



- Water Heaters
  - Pressure Tanks
  - Toilets
  - Faucets
  - Sewer Cleaning
  - General Plumbing Of All Kinds •
- Service & Installation All Water Softners

**573-336-3398**

*"No Job Too Small"*

OPEN MONDAY THRU SATURDAY

**Sidetracker  
Lounge**

Business Loop • St. Robert

**DJ • 8:00 PM**

*Oldies but Goodies*

*50's & 60's*

Bobby & Patty Bunch 336-5505



He went to investigate and found Roubidoux lying dead on his bed of deer skins. Roubidoux was a man of slight build and John McLaughlin carried him in his arms to a burial ground on a hill nearby where he buried his friend and only neighbor in an unmarked grave. John McLaughlin died and 1840 and was also buried at the same grounds in an unmarked grave. Richard McLaughlin, age 15, survived him. The settlement of John McLaughlin's estate in 1841 was the first official business recorded by a Texas County Court. So ended the lives of two early pioneers, one a farmer and land developer, the other a hunter and trapper. The courage, bravery and hardships of these men are representative of our forefathers who have made it possible for us to have a better existence here today. Mr. Roubidoux was the last of the early Frenchmen engaged in the hunting, trapping and fur industry in the Roubidoux area and John McLaughlin, the first of the permanent settlers here, marking an important division line in early Texas County history.

Now, what is the relationship between this man, Roubidoux, and the naming of Roubidoux Creek: Evidence indicates that the man, Roubidoux, had been living,

hunting and trapping on this creek for a number of years before the creek had been named. Until recently there were remnants of a number of one-man "forts" up and down the creek. They were made of stone and measured about 5 by 10 feet and 2 and a half feet high. Perhaps Roubidoux used these structures as sleeping quarters while on his hunting and trapping trips up and down the creek, for storage of game and animal skins, and possibly as an escape from Indians and wild animals. His long tenure on the creek indicates he must have had sole and complete control of the creek and watershed for a number of years for purposes of hunting and trapping. It would thus be referred to as Roubidoux's Creek, and finally, Roubidoux Creek.

Joseph Roubidoux (1783-1868) was a French explorer and trapper. He is well known for the founding of St. Joseph and for naming it for his patron saint. It is recorded in the place names study of the Missouri State Historical Society that Roubidoux Creek of Texas and Pulaski counties was named for Joseph Roubidoux. There is no documentary evidence that Joseph ever lived or visited in this



Huge tree produces huge acorns. Compare its size to the quarter lying at the right of the acorn.

area, but members of the Roubidoux family are known for participating in trapping and the fur trade industry in the more remote parts of Missouri. No doubt the responsibility for the naming of Roubidoux must rest with this

member of the Roubidoux family who spent his last years hunting and trapping on its banks and is buried on a hill overlooking the valley, the ancient Bur Oak, and the creek he must have grown to love.

## Columbia College

Serving the Fort Leonard Wood area since 1976.

### DESIGNED FOR WORKING ADULTS

- Degree counseling
- Convenient eight-week sessions
- Day and evening classes
- Affordable tuition
- Financial aid for those who qualify

### EARN AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE

- Business Administration
- Criminal Justice
- Computer Information Systems
- General Studies



### EARN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE

- Business Administration
- Criminal Justice Administration
- Computer Information Systems
- Individual Studies
- History
- Psychology

Sessions start in January, March, June, August & October

573/329-4050 or toll-free 1-800/787-1604 • www.ccis.edu

Accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

Dentistry With Care, For The Past 25 Years.

**GASCONADE  
DENTAL**



**HILLS  
CENTERS**



### We offer the following:

United Concordia Provider • Accept Assignment of Benefits  
Visiting Specialists • Evening Appointments  
Dental Implants • Dental Laboratory on Premises  
Sedation for the Anxious • Relaxed Atmosphere



**573-336-5563**

283 B. East Lawn Avenue, St. Robert  
(Across from Wal-Mart Automotive Center)



"A Century of Combined Staff Experience"