

# My Hometown, Waynesville

By Ruby L. Reed

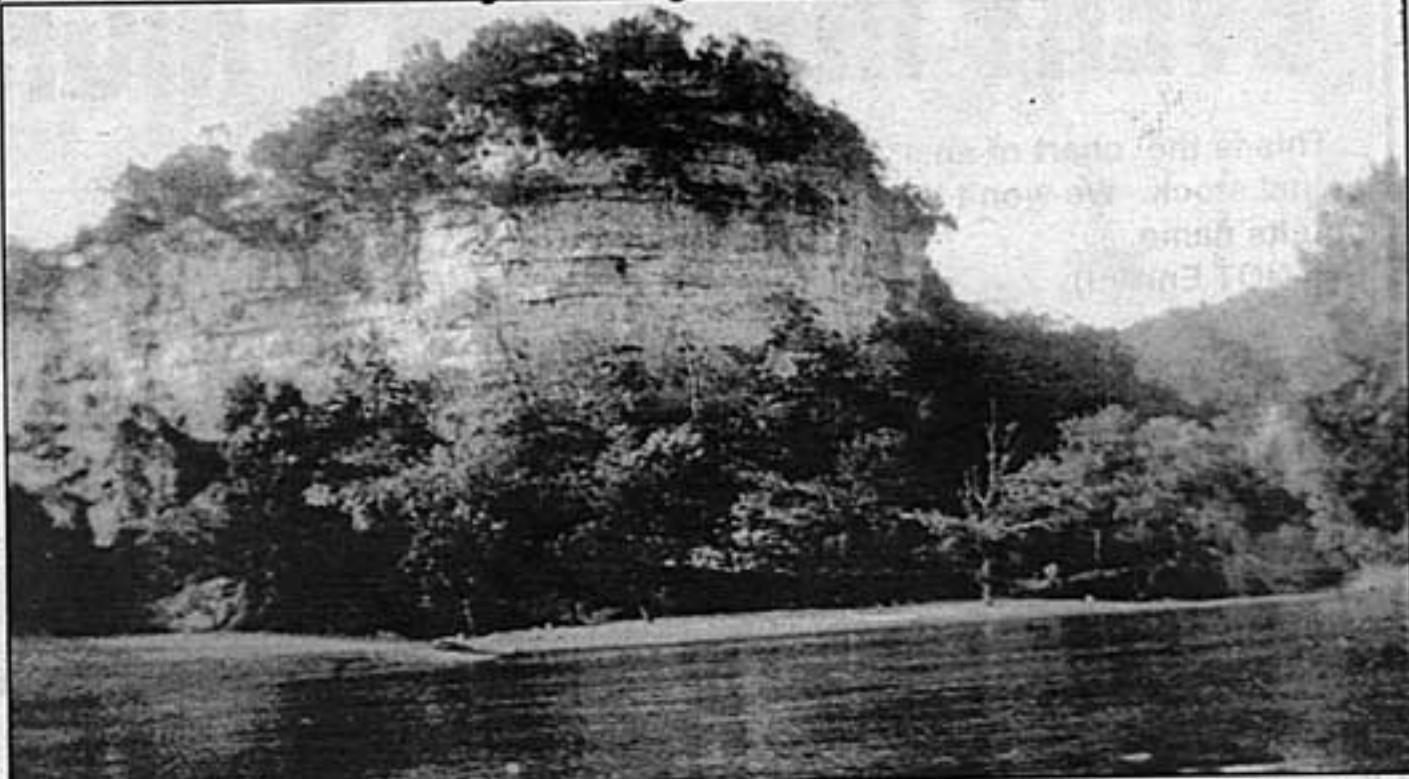
Our school days did not consist entirely of Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. We had many other activities such as spelling and cyphering matches, various exhibitions as they were called, some times on Friday afternoons at the school and at other times for the general public at night.

We had one teacher who opened school each morning by reading a chapter from the Hoosier books, which were published about that time, and there were not many tardy marks I can assure you. In the winters (which it seems to me were much colder than we have now), we had a wonderful time coasting on a slope back of the school.

It was in a field and there was no danger at all. The sleds were mostly made by the boys and some were very large. We would pile on just as long as we could get a foot-hold and at times there would be eight or ten on one sled.

If this became too mild, we would adjourn to the hill where the old fort had been. It was really steep and had a bad curve that could throw you off in spite of yourself. The streets, however, were practically deserted at night, and if you could stay on around the curve, the sled would have so much momentum by the time it reached the foot of the hill you could coast a city block before stopping.

Along the Roubidoux were eddies where it would freeze if we had a long cold spell. Other times we would have to resort to the sloughs that were left when



The way pike's peak north of Waynesville looked before the current bridge on Route 17 was constructed.

Photo courtesy of Mary Ann Kamins.

the water was high, and then every night there was a skating party.

We were fortunate, however, if the ice stayed on for 3 or 4 weeks and no one could get too expert with this small amount of practice. I guess the lessons in school really suffered while the ice was on. The boys would build large bonfires which provided light as well as heat.

In the rural homes more than in town, they would have what we called "play-parties" or "swing-em-arounds," in which the players sang their own music as they whirled to and fro.

At other times they had the regular square-dances, which are now sweeping the country. They had no fancy floors, because, as a usual thing, it was just a

room in a country house from which the furniture had been removed.

At the Fourth of July picnics they always had a rough dance floor and it seemed to me that some couples could dance all day and far into the night. There were many of the young folks who would not dance in such a public place.

Another form of recreation we had was

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to load in a hay-wagon and drive out to a spring somewhere in the country. These could be found in any direction, and there we would have egg-roasts and picnic dinners or weiner and marshmallows roasted on sticks over a fire. Many times in winter we simply hiked to whatever spot we had chosen.

There was one thing we enjoyed that is fast becoming a lost art. We had family and group singing. Most every family had an organ or piano and sometimes we

would put to shame some of the so-called music that comes over the air today.

After passing school age, we frequently put on home-talent plays and some of them were quite successful. During this period, before the advent of picture shows, there were many traveling circuses, medicine shows, lyceums and cha-tauquas, of which we had our full quota.

The years have a way of passing and one by one the old crowd began to marry or seek jobs in other places and before we

had time to realize it, we were grown up and the war clouds began forming over Europe.

At first we heard only the rumble, but as time passed it began to seem inevitable that we would be drawn into the vortex. In

the spring of 1917, it happened.

Not long before this a young boy about 15 years of age left home and unknown to his folks, joined the Marines. Being tall for his age, he had passed himself off as being older than he was. After it became known, his father decided not to interfere.



Let's play ball! The boys of summer--Howard Mitchell, Dale Hancock, and Leo Sparks--pose for the camera on their field of dreams sometimes around 1924. Courtesy of Bill Morgan from the Irene Morgan Collection.

sang in our homes and other times we would gather in the warm evenings on somebody's lawn and sing to the strumming of a guitar. When we went on hayrides we sang without any instrument. So many people today depend on "canned music," but I think the harmony we made



Two Waynesville boys -- Lawrence Hensley and Howard Mitchell -- take a break from sledding March 8, 1931. Phot courtesy of Bill Morgan from Irene Morgan Collection.

Just a few days after we entered the war the Marines landed and this young boy gave his life and is sleeping in foreign soil.

Not too many years after the close of the first World War the little town began to go modern. Highway 66 was built right up Main Street.

But that was only the beginning. In the winter of 1940 rumors began to fly that the government was going to build a fort on the ridge east of town, which, ever since I could remember, had been known as "Gospel Ridge."

By spring construction was begun and the whole region became a bedlam. The name, Waynesville, Missouri, became so far-flung that Life Magazine sent a reporter to write an article about it. He apparently did not look for any of the good and the natives were not proud of the things he published.

If you would suddenly pick New York up and drop it over into some city a tenth of its size you would create something of the same conditions that were thrust on this little community and the good citizens were not to blame for what developed.

Then came December 7, 1941, and another boy from Waynesville went to a watery grave at Pearl Harbor.

Fort Leonard Wood was completed and thousands upon thousands of boys have passed through its gates. I doubt if there is any state in the Union or many foreign countries where there has not been someone who in the past has walked the streets of the little village that once was only a pin point on the map.

WAYNESVILLE  
(BEFORE ROUTE 66 & THE FORT)  
A poem by Ruby L. Reed  
Nov. 1957

There's a valley winding through the hills,  
Where sparkling waters flow,  
And in this valley midst the hills  
Was the home I used to know...  
There happy childhood days were spent,  
Near nature's open door.  
We had no wealth to count in gold,  
But blessings worth far more.

Now, time has changed that little town,  
Has brought a state highway;  
Electric lights and motor cars,  
With noise, both night and day,  
And when I travel back again,  
So strange it seems to me;  
I find the little town I knew  
Is just a memory.

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