Some Interesting Pioneers

The interesting history of our country is well recorded and documented. There are plenty of heroes and villains contained in hundreds of thousands of books and articles. But, so very little has been written about ordinary men and women who struggled for a better way of life for themselves and their families, and who in the process helped to built our great nation.

Genealogical research and oral history passed down from generation to generation allows us to fill in some of the missing gaps in the fascinating history of America's great, largely unsung pioneers.

WILLIAM WALLACE WADE

Such is the case with the biography of William Wallace Wade, which was submitted to us by Donnie and Glenna Scott of St. Robert. Wade was Mr. Scott's maternal great grandfather.

He was born April 21, 1854 in St. Charles County, Missouri, and moved into Pulaski County at some unknown date.

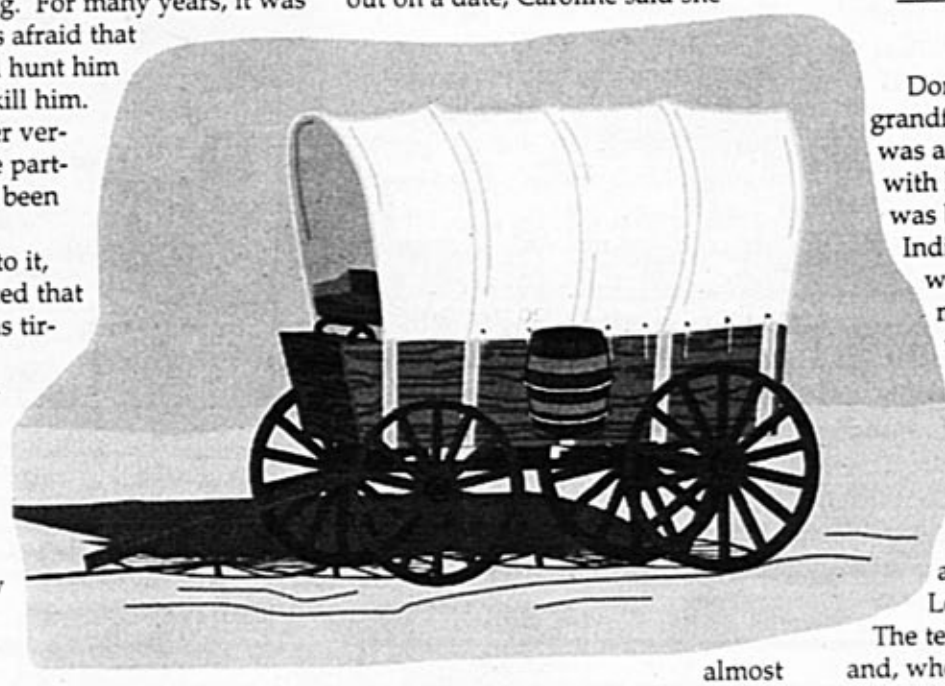
There is a story that, when William Wade was fourteen or fifteen years old, he rode with the famous Missouri outlaw Jesse James for a while. His job apparently was to hold the horses of the James gang members while they carried out some of their famous robberies.

James and Wade were said to have met by accident. Both were at a dance hall one night. Noticing the teenager's fine black and white horse tied up outside, the outlaw inquired about the identity of its owner. He was led to William; and in the course of conversing with the boy, James wound up recruiting the impressionable youngster to ride with him and his gang.

What an exciting adventure that must have been for William, a teenager's dream come true of living on the edge and associating with the famous outlaw, whose exploits were being glamorized by many of the Democrat newspapers in the state. After about a year, however, the teenager apparently became disillusioned not only with this rugged and dangerous way of life, but with James as well. William later told people that Jesse was a very mean man.

There are two versions of how William Wade left the James gang. One version has him trying to find a way to leave without being shot. One day, however, he found a believable excuse to ride off on his own, perhaps on a mission on behalf of the gang to a nearby town. Once safely outside of the gang's hideout, he put as many miles as he could between himself and the gang. For many years, it was said, he was afraid that Jesse would hunt him down and kill him.

The other version has the parting to have been amicable. According to it, James noticed that William was tiring of the rough existence that living outside the law required. The outlaw asked the boy if he wanted to go home. So, when William answered affirmatively, the outlaw gave him $100 and told him to ride off and never look back.



Interestingly, these two versions seemingly mirror the Jekyll and Hyde nature of Jesse James' character that has been handed down to us through newspaper accounts, history books, and biographies. They also reflect our collective ambivalence regarding the legacy of the outlaw and his gang. Was Jesse a latter day Robin Hood, who robbed from the rich and gave to the poor, as portrayed and exploited by many post Civil War, pro-southern Democrat politicians and newspaper editors of those times? Or, were Jesse and his gang the lawless, mad dog killers that Republican politicos and their allies claimed they were? We cannot know for sure, one way or the other..

William Wade's introduction to Pulaski County may have come immediately after he left the James gang. Sparsely populated at the time, this was an ideal spot for the young man to lose himself and start anew. In time, he married Florence Smith and raised a family around the Spring Creek and Bloodland area, which is now within the boundaries of Fort Leonard Wood. Florence died at a young age and left William with two small children to raise. He enlisted the help of Caroline Gan and a few other baby sitters to take care of the children. There apparently was a mutual attraction between William and Caroline. So, when he asked her out on a date, Caroline said she almost swooned. They later got married and lived for several years in the Spring Creek area on the Big Piney River in a house that was built like a lodge with an entrance into the bedrooms and kitchen from the outside.

Only the main living area had heat, according to Opal Story, a teacher at Rolling Heath School who boarded with the couple for $15 a month. She said that the kitchen and dining area had no window glass. The holes were covered with canvas, but it got so cold in those rooms that a person couldn't stand to pick up the bone chilling cold silverware.

Caroline Wade apparently was a very kind woman. Opal said that she was one of the sweetest people she ever knew. When the weather got its coldest, Caroline would bring hot irons to put in Opal's bed to warm it up for the teacher. Many people who knew William, however, said that he was a rather rough character who never passed up a chance for a good fight.

William came up with enough money to buy forty acres and a shack on old Slabtown Road in Texas County. That's where he died on March 26, 1945. He was buried in the Craddock Cemetery.

One of his sons was Richard Devers Wade, who married Rosa (Rosie) Belle Helms of Spring Creek in Phelps County on January 23, 1881. Their union produced eight children.

WILLIAM HENRY SCOTT

Donnie Scott's great great grandfather, William Henry Scott, was another interesting figure with his own claim to fame. He was brought from Kentucky to Indiana as a baby by his parents, who died a short time after the move. The orphaned child was taken in by the Harvey Fullbright family. When William was sixteen years old, the Fullbrights and another family, the Smithers, came to Missouri in a wagon train in 1831. They settled on a farm five miles northwest of Lebanon in Laclede County.

The teenager got a job on a farm and, when he was 27 years old, married Mary C. Smithers, who was eight years his junior, in 1841.

After spending some time homesteading a piece of land and improving it, William and Mary sold out and bought a large, improved farm six miles west of Dixon in Maries County. William eventually became a large landowner and at one time owned 700 acres of land. He was said to have been one of the largest taxpayers in Maries County at the time. William Scott also was the first farmer in that part to have installed a wire fence.

Mary was a short, heavy women who liked to fish. "Aunt Dutch," as many people called her, loved to fish. She often was found fishing the Tavern Creek, which ran through the Scott farm. Sometimes, she would go to the creek and catch big green turtles. Bringing them home, "Aunt Dutch" put them in a barrel and poured butter milk in it to fatten the turtles and prepare them for some flavorful cooking.

William and his wife had thirteen children before she died in 1885. A few years later, the widower, who was about 75 years old, took a second wife, Elizabeth Walker, a tender girl of seventeen. She presented William

with one child before leaving him and the infant in 1895.

This winter-spring marriage apparently created quite a stir in the community and caused problems within the family. William's surviving children from his first marriage, ranging in age from around 38 to 56 years, never accepted their father's teenage wife. Following Elizabeth's departure, they would not have anything to do with him for many years.

Hard-pressed to raise a small child on his own at the age of 83, William and seven-year-old daughter, Ethel, were taken in by the parents of great grandson William Oliver Scott and lived with this family in Richland from 1897-1899.

During his stay with this family, the old man often told a story about the origin of a well-known pond in Richland. It was started, he said, by himself in his homesteading days and by the Fullbright family. One day, they decided to start a deer lick at the site by salting a low spot in the terrain. The deer came there in droves to lick the salt. After repeated visits, the action of their hoofs pounded depressions in the soil that collected increasing amounts of water. So, when Frisco Railroad officials found themselves in need of a convenient and dependable source of water for their water tank in town, they scooped out this area and made a pond.

In 1900, William married Mrs. John Willice, but the marriage ended with her death the next year.

Time eventually healed the rift between the old man and his children, with whom he lived until his death at the age of 100 on September 26, 1915.

William Henry Scott served in the Civil War with two of his sons, John Henry and George S. The three men were under the command of Captain Charles Frost in Company M of the 3rd Missouri Volunteers. He was the grandfather of Benjamin Franklin "Sam" Scott, who was the first to build a clubhouse in the prominent cave overlooking Roubidoux Creek north of Waynesville. This clubhouse opened in 1903.

Four men pose on the skeleton of the first metal bridge across Roubidoux Creek in Waynesville, which was located a short distance downstream of the current bridge. At that time, North Street extended via the bridge over the creek. When a newer bridge was constructed, the bridge in this picture was dismantled and reassembled over the Gasconade River north of Waynesville at Lundstrom Ford. It was later replaced. A careful inspection of the scene reveals a wooden footbridge spanning one branch of the creek at the left base of the metal platform. Courtesy of Bob and Geneva Goodrich.