

*Dru L. Pippin (1899-1981), son of Dr. Bland Nixon Pippin (1874-1945) who created Pippin Place, wrote a short feature for "Postscripts," the newsletter of the Officers' Wives Club at Fort Leonard Wood. The club is now known as the Fort Wood Community Spouses' Club and still publishes the newsletter. Dru's piece was reprinted in the January 31, 1980, issue of the Pulaski County Democrat. In addition to operating Pippin Place for more than four decades, Dru served two terms on the Missouri Conservation Commission and was a much sought after raconteur. Dru died three years before Pippin Place burned, sparing him the sight of his father's dream going up in smoke (see page 47).*

### **Pippin Place: A Dream That Became History** by Dru L. Pippin

When asked to write something about Pippin Place, my mind immediately reverted to a quote appropriately used to identify this picturesque setting "Out of the smoke zone with Ozark beauty at its best." I said yes immediately, because here is history; here is a lifetime of family operation and cooperation. Here is dignity and unblemished reputation. Here is a story that can never be duplicated, or attempted for that matter, because of changed economic conditions and stresses.

My father, born and raised about ten miles from the Pippin Place site, had daydreams as most boys do. His chore was to shell corn and take it to Bartlett Mill in a meal sack across the back of his trusted nag. To him, this was not a task, rather a day eagerly anticipated from one trip to the next. Water power was the source of energy that rotated the two French stone burrs producing a product that cannot be duplicated in any other way. Sometimes the head of water was diminished and he had to wait his turn until the water caught up behind the earthen dam. This was his opportunity to fish or swim or just daydream about a time when he might own this very spot.

As he grew, went to school and became a prominent dentist in St. Louis, this dream never left him. Rather it matured with adult planning and determination, until in 1911 he bought 40 acres of land, spring and dam site.

Thus was the beginning of a family-operated vacation resort that lasted until 1969. Acreage was added, changes made, and additions built, but over a half-century of hard work and love is the hidden beauty only those of us who participated can see or appreciate to the fullest.

In 1914, virgin oak and sycamore trees were felled and the logs cut into dimension lumber to frame the building under construction. World War I was in progress and men unable to pass a military physical dug the foundation with pick and shovel. Sweaty teams and tired men "slip scraped" the hardpan away to meet grade specifications; others hauled sand and gravel from the river, others brought cement from the railroad, and everyone had a chance to mix the aggregate and cement and pour concrete or carry hods to the stonemasons. Two carpenters, a stonemason, a plumber and an electrician were the only non-resident workers; all others were natives. An historic spot was being erected and a boy's dream coming true.

The three-story mill was torn down and replaced with a smaller two-story structure. The stone burrs for grinding grains were installed on the first floor; the forebay and turbine at stream level and a five kilowatt direct current generator placed on the second floor. The brightness of light produced depended on the amount of water going through the turbine. Many, many times the lights were as dim as that of a coal oil lamp, but storing water in daytime gave energy for the night.

An electric pump sucked water from the spring and forced it uphill some 60 feet above the house level so that gravity pressure from a concrete tank gave ample water pressure for indoor facilities.

The first vacation guests came in 1915. The Frisco trains stopped in Crocker for passengers going to or from Pippin Place. Livery operators at Crocker met all trains, first with teams and buggies, and then with Model T Fords; and drove them fifteen miles to their destination. Modern accommodations, good food, wholesome environment,



Dr. Bland N. Pippin

congenial associates and good fishing made this new business a promising endeavor.

In 1919 twelve bedrooms and a spacious recreation hall with a hard maple floor was added to the original structure. Self-supporting straight logs 40 feet long with bark intact were framed into trusses and raised to their positions for roof support. In those days dentists used vulcanized

rubber as material for dentures. My dad included strong wire as reinforcement in the uppers to withstand the jaw pressure. The design of the roof trusses is the same design he used for wiring his dentures!

A local couple operated the place for two years [*lawyer Fred Scott and wife*], then my mother [*Nancy Vaughn Pippin*] with my help for four years. My wife and I bought additional adjoining land and we operated Pippin Place for forty-four years before selling. For forty-three years we were fortunate in having, as Duncan Hines called him, "John, Dean of Chefs," a black man famous for his cooking, his love of people, and his loyalty to the Pippin family. His reputation for hot rolls, cornbread sticks, and peppermint ice cream spread far and wide.

Compare these rates with today's prices and you wonder how it was done. Rates included three meals a day and rooms varied from \$3.50 a person per day to \$6.00 per person per day depending on whether or not the room had a private bath or was located upstairs or down. Food was served family style for all to enjoy regardless of room rates. Monthly rates were quoted and references were required. The secret of success was a 95 percent occupancy and a large portion of the food, including milk and meat, being produced on the farm.

Then came the depression and World War II seriously hampering the ability of people to take vacations. The building of Fort Leonard Wood was not conducive to the quiet, tranquility and peace so necessary for a vacation spot. Because of a shortage of houses in the area, quarters at Pippin Place were in demand for contractors and white collar employees keeping all rooms occupied. R.E.A. solved

the power problem. Drilling of a deep well solved the water problem. Highway improvements solved the transportation problem and installation of a circulating hot water heating system solved the heat problem.

All Army health standards were met so Army officers and their families continued to keep all rooms occupied and regardless of rationing, food stamps and price freezes, the rates did not change. References were still required and we depended as before on satisfied customers for our advertising. Duncan Hines and "Scenic Inns of America" unsolicited on our part, gave us their blessings and recommendations.

Special parties, weddings, receptions, school banquets and reunions, regular civic club meetings, dance and card clubs, as well as individual dinners, all by reservation only, were daily events. We always accepted a customer's check and not once in 53 years of operation was a check ever returned. So as I said in the beginning, this true story is one of a man who would be 105 years old today, proving that "We are such stuff as dreams are made of."

As you view the etching on glass of the northern elevation of Pippin Place, maybe what I have said will remind you of the depth of etching made on the hearts and minds of those who were a part of a dream that took over a half-century to unfold.

The future, you ask? I understand that again 40 acres of land and the building have been sold and that an operation similar to ours of years ago will be resumed. Could this be history repeating itself? Could it be another dream in the making? The beauty of the glass etching is completed as the etching of history goes on and on.

*The Gazette has published several articles about the resort's history, e.g. "Pippin Place-Serving Pulaski as a Long-time Ozarks Resort" by Gary Kremer and Lynn Morrow, 2001 Old Settlers Gazette. Listen to two of Dru's entertaining stories in the podcast section of our web site at <http://www.oldstagecoachstop.org/podcasts2.html>*

*More of Dru's memoirs and musings can be found on our website at <http://www.oldstagecoachstop.org/geezerindex3.html>.*