

# G. E. Ingram – Rural Photographer

John Bradbury  
Terry Primas

George Edward Ingram, familiarly known as Edd, was born southeast of Edgar Springs in Phelps County in 1889. Edd was descended from Louis and Adolphine Renaud, who immigrated from France in 1820, settling first in St. Louis but moving westward to the hill country near Edgar Springs. Their daughter, Celia, married Frank M. Jackson and their daughter, Lucy Emma, married Tennessean Abraham E. Ingram. This marriage produced Edd and his sisters Ella, Lizzie, and Delpha.

Somehow or another, Edd got interested in photography as a young man, employing the boxy and cumbersome glass plate camera pioneered by several generations of aspiring photographers. Beginning about 1910 and continuing into

1916, he became the first and only commercial photographer in rural areas of Crawford, Dent, Phelps, Pulaski and Texas Counties. The word “commercial” is used loosely. He did not advertise and, like many photographers, made a living by other means. Whether or not he simply subsidized his hobby or had larger aspirations is not known, but developing chemicals, paper and travel cost money. Surely he made a few bucks for his work but it was not likely to have been particularly lucrative.

In this issue of the *Gazette*, we revisit Edd Ingram’s work as the best visual record of rural life in this area before the advent of Kodak cameras began an era of popular photography. A majority of Edd’s work is unidentified as to time or place.

However, the earliest and best-identified portion of his work are nearly 400 glass plate negatives in the collections of the State Historical Society of Missouri. This selection includes a series of photographs of rural school classes with their teachers, identified by chalkboards bearing the name of the school and date. From these we know that Edd began close to home, photographing the classes at Elm Spring and Weber Schools near Edgar Springs in 1910. Subsequently he expanded his photographic territory in 1911-1915, ranging from Edgar Springs eastward to Elk Prairie, Lake Spring, Barnitz Lake, Lecom, and Cook Station, south to Licking and Slabtown, west to Beulah, Duke, and

Competition, and north as far as Jerome. He went to Sligo in 1916 to make two photographs of the class. They may have been his last school photos.

Other photographs among the Ingram assemblage show rural life on small farms and in the fields. Although they were made in the second decade of the twentieth century, photos of hands working in fields in the seasonal routine of plowing, putting up hay and shucking corn point to ways of life persisting from much earlier times. Traditional pastimes are well-represented by baseball teams, children playing, baptizings, and pot luck suppers on church and school grounds. Musicians proudly displaying their instruments indicate other forms of popular entertainment. Other photos show political meetings, fraternal lodge dignitaries, and events such as those on the picnic grounds at Barnitz Lake featuring trapeze artists and the “Duck In Dive Out” booth.

Edd photographed rural folks still getting around in buggies, wagons, and in the saddle. Horses still worked the fields and lived with goats, chickens and the family dogs. And there was still money being made in the timber, evidenced by his photos of the tie slide near Slabtown (the only known view of this landmark of the tie-rafting era along the Big Piney River), portable sawmills, a shingle mill, and tented camps in the woods. Other photos show the height of small farm ruralism in the region, which had expanded rapidly since the 1880s. There are examples of country banks, general stores, new barns, and silos. There are many photos of small but tidy homes (mostly of lumber, not logs, but lumber) including a view showing a family working on an addition to the homeplace. But elements

of the modern age appear in track workers and handcars (undoubtedly on Frisco rails near Newburg or the Salem Branch line) and steam boilers powering saws and mills in the woods. Steam tractors made an appearance on some farms but also pulled graders, working roads for trucks and cars yet to come. On the cusp of the automobile age, Edd made two photos of new machines that were probably among the first of the new machines in the area.

A postcard message in 1918 to sister Ella, who was living at Craddock, may have been prophetic. It said, “Ella, if you are not going to use your Kodak Sat & Sun, wish you would send it down by Charlie tomorrow if you haven’t any film send it anyhow. I am going to Salem and don’t want to take mine so unhandy.” Sometime around 1918, according to the family, Edd laid down his glass plate camera and never took another picture. By then, George Eastman and his Kodak company had perfected paper-backed roll film which was developed and printed at its Rochester, N. Y. plant. It was manufacturing affordable cameras that anyone could use and get a decent picture in daylight. The company’s slogan “You press the button and we’ll do the rest” sparked the snapshot craze. With the challenge and specialty of photography gone, maybe Edd lost interest in it.

In 1917, he took a job with the American Car Company, a builder of wooden trolley cars in St. Louis, but suffered an injury and returned to the farm near Edgar Springs. Edd farmed into the early 1950s when electricity came to rural Phelps County. He developed a new specialty and wired many of the area’s houses for lights. He died in 1979 and is buried in Ozark Hills Memorial Cemetery in Rolla.



You may spot Edd Ingram in some of his photographs.

# In the Timber

Since the first raft of planks floated down the Big Piney River in the winter of 1816, work in the timber has been a mainstay of lifeways in Old Pulaski and remained so until World War II. First with lumber and then railroad ties, wood products provided the earliest industry in this area, thereby offering work in the relative wilderness, a reason to settle in the area. It also put places on the map, such as Slabtown, Dog Town, and Piney Bluff.

Harvesting logs for the sawmill or hewing railroad ties was done after the growing season and provided cash for things that could not be bartered for, such as taxes. At 10 cents a “stick,” railroad ties meant a livelihood for many subsistence farmers. When the trees near the river were exhausted, the slack was taken up in the woods by portable sawmills. The old logging families stayed in the business by adopting portable mills which could be transported almost anywhere the timber was.



Tie slide on the Big Piney River



Saw mill



Portable saw mill



Gasoline-powered shingle saw mill



Boys with draw knife and axes



# On the Farm



These were the days of the small self-sufficient farmstead., the pinnacle of which lasted until World War I. Edd gave up farming about this time and moved to the city.

**Above** A farmer is cultivating his corn field.



**Top right** The poor crop from the cultivated field might have been just enough to feed these chickens.



**Bottom right** This young girl and colt are standing beside an ash hopper, used for making soap, which was quaint by the turn of the 20th century but stock raising was a lifeway for generations.

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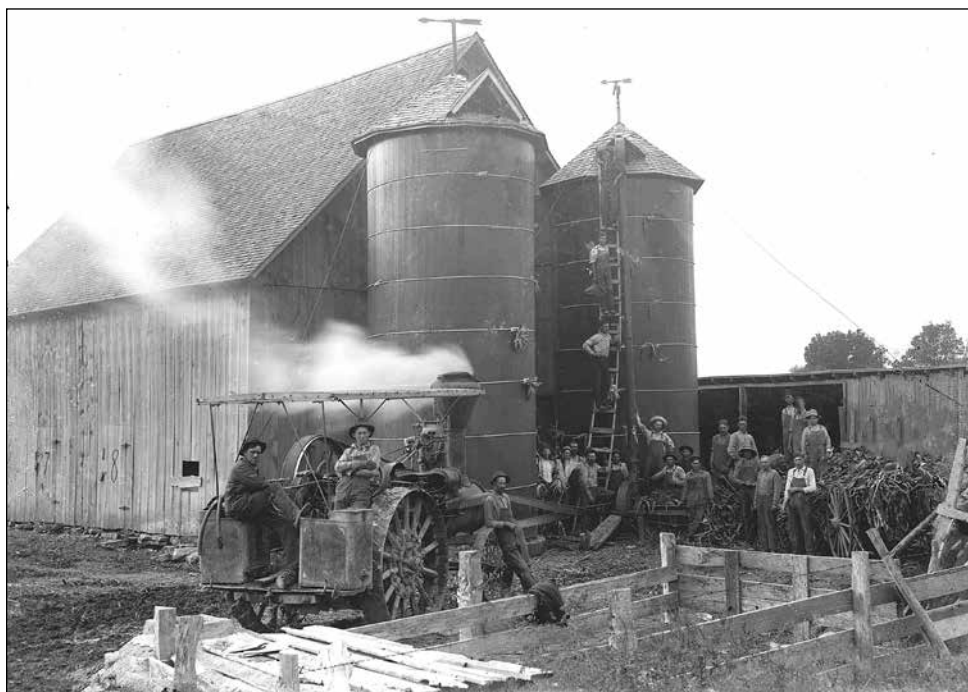
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Just as traditional as stock raising was growing crops to feed the stock which made hay time and corn harvest the busy time of the year. It was also labor intensive. As farming became more efficient, farms became larger and steam powered equipment (below) increased yields, requiring bigger barns and storage. Prosperous farmers could afford expensive silos. The even more prosperous could invest in steam traction machinery which could pull and run the various types of machinery. In previous times, neighborhood men would go from farm to farm performing the harvesting tasks. Gradually the labor was reduced by whatever machinery could replace.







**Above** Silos first made their appearance in our area ca 1910. The biggest manufacturer was Indiana Silo Co. of Anderson, Indiana. The 24-foot wooden staves were shipped by rail. They were made of either yellow pine, oak, or top-of-the -line cypress. The cost ranged from \$160 to \$300, excluding the farmer-supplied roof and foundation.

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# Traditions



Images of the many country baptisms are not plentiful so we have included both of Ingram's photographs of the rite.

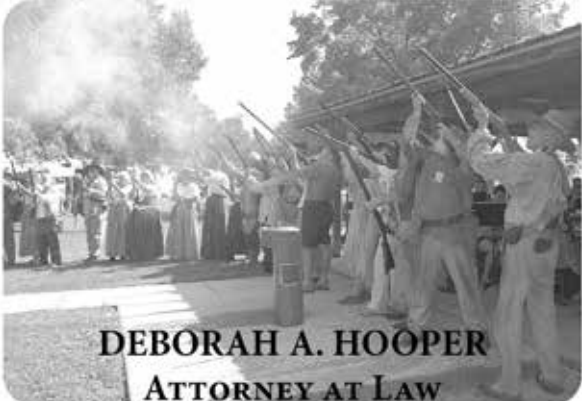


Plank dinner, maybe after baptisms



Early religious camp meetings were held in the open air or under a brush arbor. This one had a large tent.

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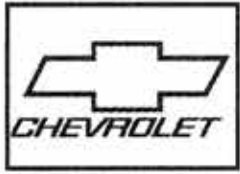


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# Home



An addition to a log home with sawn clapboards.



Hereafter, new homes and additions were built with sawed lumber.



There are many portraits of children (above) and families (top next page) at home in the collection.

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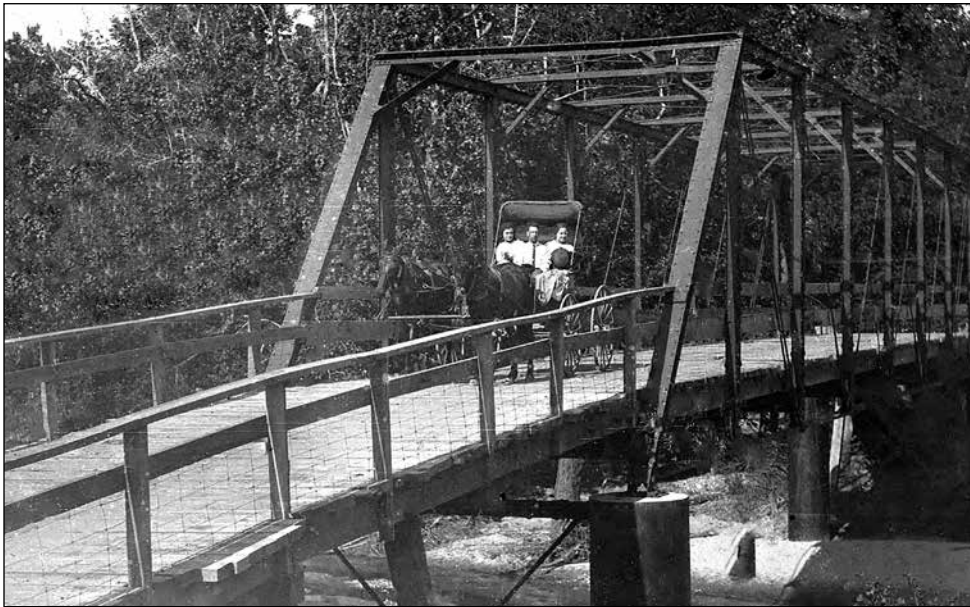
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# Getting Around



Edd with sisters, friends, and horses and buggy



Edd with sisters on Slabtown Bridge



Railroad crew clearing debris from tracks



Inspection crew on handcar

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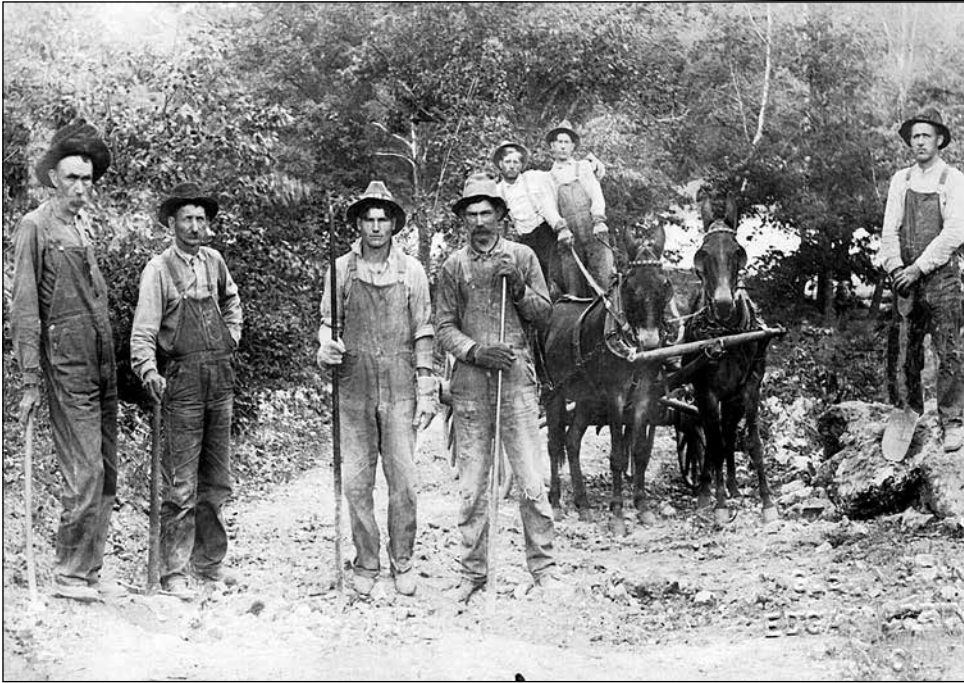
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A road crew of local men, probably working to fulfill their poll tax, manually improve a rocky road.



In the early 20th century, county road work was bid to construction outfits with their own graders to improve the roughest roads.



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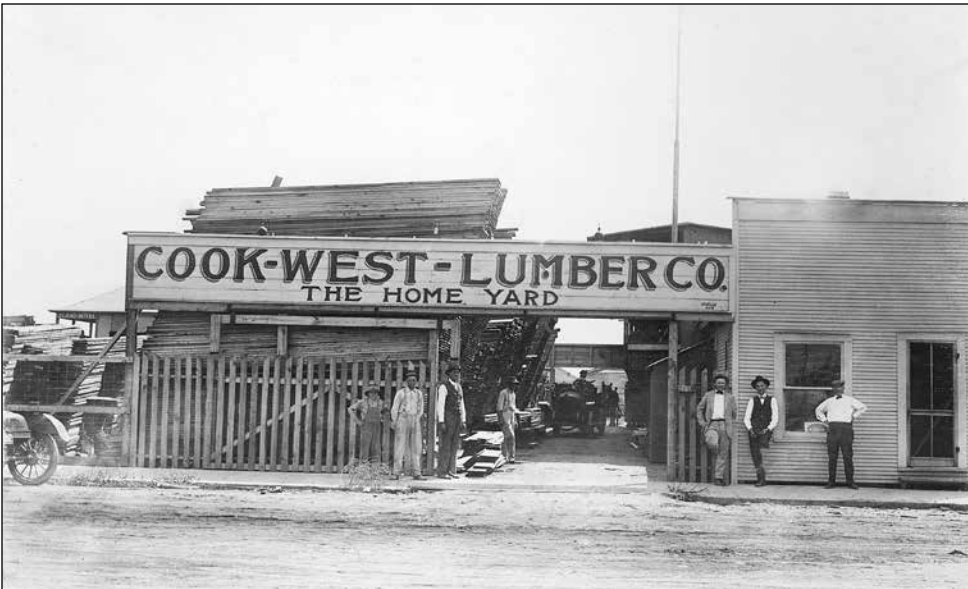


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# Commerce



We do not know the location of this “home yard” but it seems to have been in a progressive village which had some concrete sidewalks.



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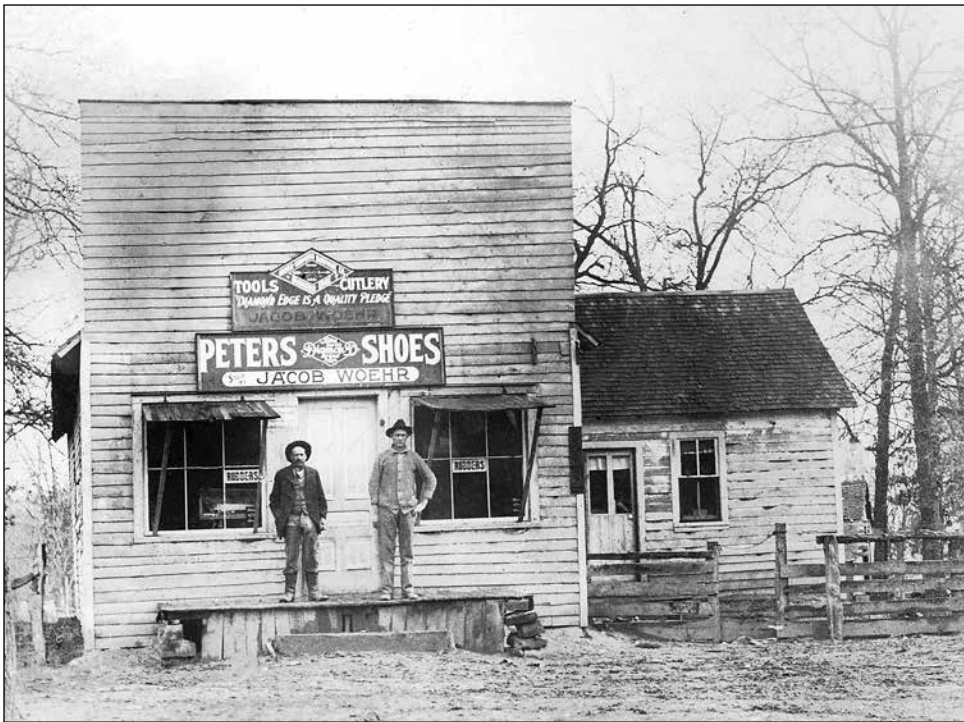
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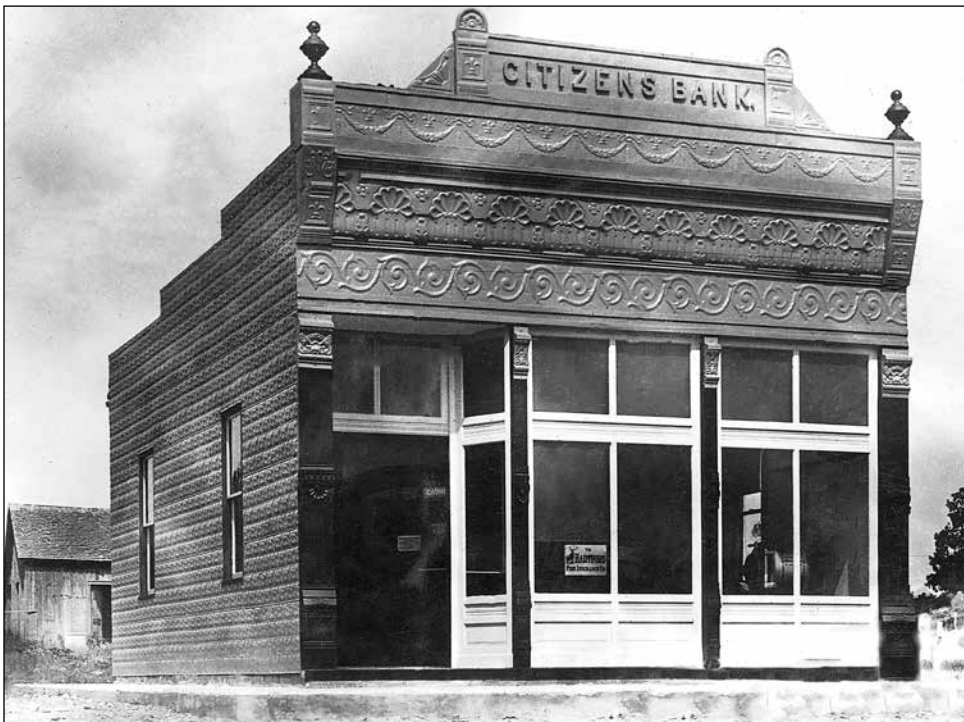




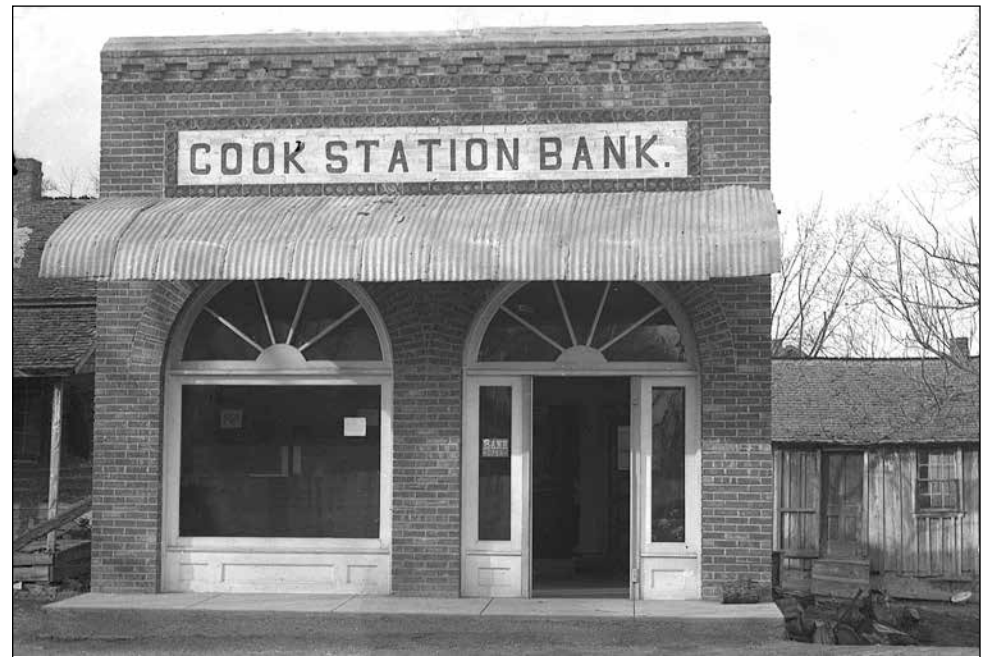
Jacob Woehr's store in Elk Prairie selling Peters Diamond Brand Shoes.



Plank & Williams mercantile selling Shapleigh Tools and Brown's Shoes.




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# Schools



Yancy Mills 1915

Edd derived a good part of his photographic income from school pictures and they may be his lasting legacy. Yancy Mills school house was between Rolla and Edgar Springs on present State Route 63.



Blooming Rose 1913

Blooming Rose School was in the southwestern corner of Phelps County, west of Beulah and south of Duke. Only two smiles in the bunch.

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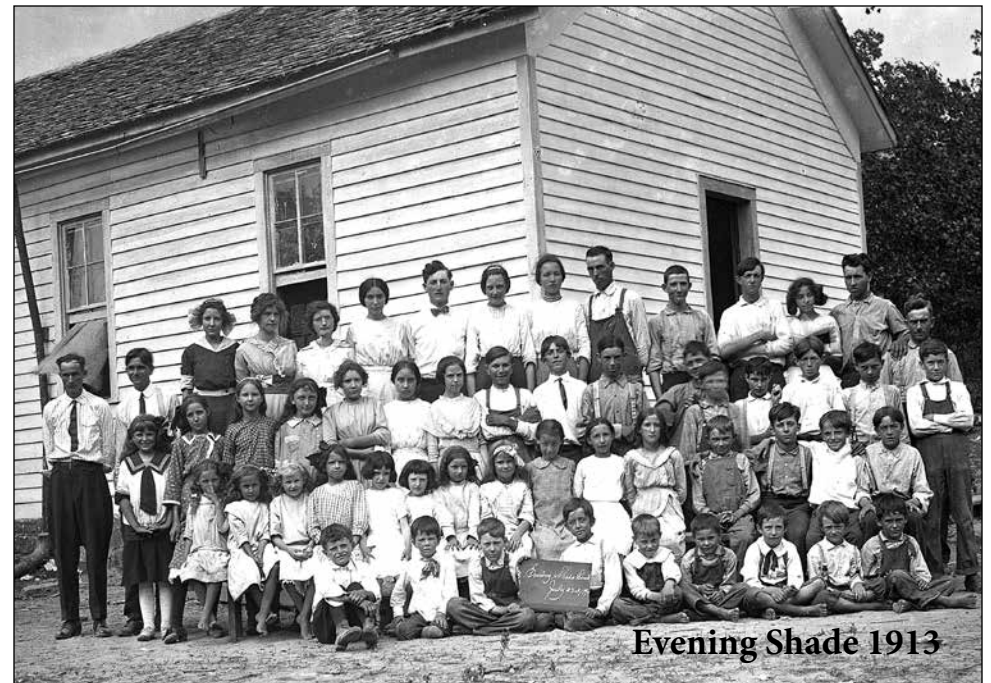
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Democrat School 1914

The Democrat School was located in southwestern Phelps County on Democrat Ridge, which the present Highway J follows, and near the rural community of Duke. There were many rural schools, located so that students did not have to walk more than three miles or so to attend. It remained open until the 1950s when it was consolidated with Edgar Springs, about nine miles away, with transportation provided.







Evening Shade 1913

There is a community called Evening Shade today in the northwest corner of Texas County on Highway AW. A previous neighborhood called Evening Shade (Old Evening Shade) where this school was located was about two miles northwest of the present one near the border of Fort Leonard Wood. In late 1940, it seemed that Old Evening Shade would become a part of the fort so some families and the name moved a bit south.

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George Poe was the teacher at Pine Bluff School in 1914. The school was named for the bluff upon which it was perched that bordered the Big Piney River in southeastern Pulaski County. It served the students along the river from Six Crossings Hollow downstream to Ross Bridge, which was built in 1908. Mr. Poe previously taught at the Democrat School, pictured on the previous page, in 1912, where he had 55 students. The school year was six months long and the average salary for men in 1914 was \$40.00 a month for six months, with female teachers often making \$5.00 a month less. Mr. Poe may have moved to Pine Bluff School because it had fewer students. Most male teachers had another source of income, such as farming.



This image of Clinton Bank School in the southeast corner of Phelps County is a bit unusual. Most often, school portraits are closeups of the students with the school as a background with only part of an exterior wall visible. The patrons of this school must have been particularly proud of their school building, as it is much more visible than the individual students.



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# Leisure Time



This picture of two trapeze artists is from a poor negative but it looks like a good show for the crowd assembled who might have also seen a hot air balloon ascension at Barnitz Lake, a parachute jump over the Gasconade at Arlington, and other traveling shows.



If a person still had a coin in a pocket, there was the Duck In Duck Out game. What kind of game it was escapes us. We don't think it was a game of chance at Barnitz Lake.



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This instant replay shows that the runner is safe. Baseball was a favorite sport in the early 20th century. Seems every village that claimed to be a town had a team that traveled to nearby neighborhoods to play their rivals.



Believe it or not, people used to attend political rallies for entertainment. This bevy of beauties are representing their counties in Thomas L. Rubey's Congressional District, comprised of parts of eleven counties. Rubey won this election, serving eight terms.

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Above This family is roughing it with a linen tablecloth.



Above Edd's sense of humor is apparent again. Locals gather around the favorite fishing hole.



Right Deer were becoming scarce but bird hunting, both turkey and quail, was still fair, especially in the Spring Creek area.



Below Kids and goat drawn carts were often seen in early 20th century postcards.



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It's never too soon to learn to play cards and smoke a pipe. This is another example of Edd's humor found in his photographs. How much of the humor was Edd's or the subjects is not known but he was surely amenable to a little different take.



The Salvation Army Band pictured here has one band member in blackface. This is the most unusual picture in Edd's collection and we have no idea about the event or group.

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The Independent Order of Odd Fellows was an alternative fraternal organization to the Masonic Lodge in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. This was the Spring Creek Lodge at Edgar Springs. Edd Ingram was a member, pictured here in middle row, third from left.

### Sources

The State Historical Society of Missouri has made available digital scans of over 400 of George E. Ingram's surviving glass plate negatives. Most of the views in this issue are from that collection. For a look at the other Ingram images in the Society's collection: <https://collections.shsmo.org/manuscripts/columbia/p0279>. We have also used a few prints from the collections of John Bradbury and Terry Primas. For views from the trove of photographs Edd left to his family, see the 2009 *Old Settlers Gazette*: <http://www.oldstagecoachstop.org/webgeezer/Gazette09/geezer09contents.html>

For other portraits and school class photographs likely to have been made by Ingram, see the *Phelps County, Missouri Heritage, Volume 2* (Rolla, MO: Phelps County Genealogical Society, 1994); and Garrett Gabel's books *Harvest—A Harvest of History of N.W. Dent & Southern Phelps Co. Missouri* (2016) and *Whilom—bygone Days of Southern Phelps Co. Mo.* (2018).

**John Bradbury** contributed articles to the *Old Settlers Gazette* for over three decades. John served as manuscript specialist and then Associate Director of the State Historical Society of Missouri's Rolla Research Center until his retirement in 2011. He generously shared local images from his large postcard collection and scores of them have illustrated the pages of this publication.

It was John's suggestion to feature the rural photography of G. E. Ingram in this year's *Old Settlers Gazette*. He wrote the introductory remarks and determined the themes and organization of the images. Although seriously ill, John was determined to finish writing the captions with co-author Terry Primas. That work was completed a scant two weeks before John's death on June 11, 2023. He was 70.

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