

Early History of Pulaski County

Pulaski County was organized in 1818 and named after the Polish Patriot Count Casimir Pulaski, hero of the Polish Anti-Russian Insurrection of 1768, and later a U.S. Army General and Chief of Cavalry under George Washington.

In 1833, Pulaski County's boundary included all of what later became Laclede and Wright counties and much of Dallas, Webster, Phelps, Texas, Maries, Camden, and Miller counties. It wasn't until 1859 that Pulaski County's present boundary was defined.

The "Old Settlers" reported that Pulaski County was abundant with springs and the valleys were generally narrow and embraced with the choicest and most productive agricultural lands, with the soil being a heavy sandy loam. The early inhabitants were also awed by the beautiful Gasconade River bluffs. At one time, Pulaski County lead the state in the most caves within its boundary. At the base of the Roubidoux Creek, where it empties into the Gasconade River, a cave lies partially hidden behind an overgrowth of weeds and trees. Arrowheads, stone pipes, a skull and other artifacts found within have given it the name of "Indian Cave." The cave is a beautiful

formation of huge caverns that geologists say were first caused by the shrinking of the earth's crust and later carved out by underground waterways flowing through the limestone ledges and fissures. This erosion eventually formed the rooms, tunnels, passageways and caverns which make up Indian Cave. A balanced rock, unattached to either walls or ceiling, perches precariously above the cave's huge mouth. Weighing several tons, the stone appears ominous to all who enter.

The first record of Indian Cave is a report of its discovery in 1816 by three men from Mississippi. In their search for potassium nitrate (Saltpeter) to make gunpowder, the three discovered the cave and named it Saltpeter Cave. In the early 1900's, it was known as Scott Cave, later as Pike's Peak Cave, and then finally by its present name.

For a short time, the cave was commercialized by a former owner, Gilbert F. Swanson, who draped electric lights for a quarter of a mile to conduct tours, a complete tour of the cave took as long as seven hours! In the mouth of the cave, Swanson set up picnic tables to serve meals to visitors. Today, the entrance of the

cave is hidden from the highway, but the wonder of its formation is there as mute testimony of the underground caverns that honeycomb the Ozarks region.

Pulaski County's heritage is rich. In 1840, Jefferson Strain struck out from Tennessee in search of a new frontier. With his tools strapped to his horses back, he followed the old Kickapoo Trail to Pulaski County. It was here he found his place. In a secluded Ozarks hollow, on a spring that runs into the Gasconade River, Strain began building a mill. With no one to help him, it took four years to cut and shape the limestone for the building's foundation. Those blocks left over he used to build a dam across the spring fed mill pond. The hand-hewn beams in the mill were made by Strain from large oak trees nearby. Those beams were morticed and tensioned together, then wooden pinned. When he finally completed his project, Strain returned to Tennessee for his family.

For the next 22 years this family operated the Gasconade Mill, but the outbreak of the Civil War saw the mill sold to John Hensley. Hensley kept the business until 1876 when it was taken over by John

Schlict. The Schlict family retained the mill until its closing, and the name was changed to Schlict's Mill.

Schlict was an emigrant from Germany who made his way to America in 1866. He soon was followed by his brother Frank and his mother, who fled to this country to escape the strife of the German wars. John was the eighth generation of millers in the Schlict family. A progressive businessman, Schlict added two more water wheels and a second pond to the mill. He invented a roller mill machine to add to his stone Buhr machines so he could make flour as well as grind corn meal and feed. After a while, he even invented his own flour bleaching process.

These improvements soon brought farmers from as far as forty miles away to have their grains processed. Activity resulting from the mill encouraged the growth of a small community which included a general store, a tavern and a barber shop. The mill became a post office as well, and the "Schlict's Spring Post Office. 1893" sign remains.

Water from the spring was channeled through the General Store to keep eggs and milk fresh and cool.

The whiskey served in the tavern was made in the Schlict's basement. That building stands on a hill overlooking the mill.

After John's death, his son Charles took over the mill and kept it running until he died in 1945. The mill had been in full operation for 105 years.

Dr. William Schlict,

nephew of Charles, inherited the property and restored the buildings. After his death, his son, Sherman, remained on for a while. In 1976, Sherman sold the mill to Bernard Schermer, a wholesaler and distributor from St. Louis.

Today, the area is overgrown. The pond is filled with algae and surrounded by weeds. No longer do the wheels turn. No longer do people gather there with sacks of feed to be ground. Instead, the buildings sit in quiet desolation.

Early settlers found the 1800's equivalent of a rest stop in what was known as the Waynesville Stagecoach Depot and Tavern. In their westward migration, pioneers traveled along what became known as the "Old Wire Road!" Today that route is the path of Interstate 44, but during the Civil War, it was bordered by telegraph wires strung from Rolla to Fort Smith, Arkansas. A union attempt to keep abreast of the confederates actions along the way. At the end of the war, the wires were taken down, but for many years, the telegraph poles stood from Cassville to Springfield.

Those early pioneers whether journeying by stagecoach, covered wagon, or mule train, stopped along the way to rest and relax in places such as Waynesville's Stagecoach Depot and Tavern. The two-story hotel-tavern, built in 1852, has remained virtually unchanged since then. White wood siding now hides the original frame of the hand-hewn logs, but the wooden

rafters and beams are still clearly visible within. Fireplaces stand at each end of the first story, and from its Veranda an outside stairway leads to the Portico and sleeping rooms above.

It was in these rooms that injured Union soldiers were treated when those forces commandeered the building for a hospital in 1862.

At the war's end the hotel reopened and remained in operation for close to a century more. Although the old depot is showing its weather beaten years, it isn't beyond repair. Recently, members of the Old Stagecoach Stop Foundation, created under the auspices of the Community Betterment Council, have started efforts to restore the stagecoach stop. In its day, the California House was used as a stagecoach stop on the "Old Wire Road," a halfway house from Richland to Waynesville, and a tavern serving hot meals to weary travelers heading west. It was built in the 1850s during the California Gold Rush, and some of the gold mined was used to pay for construction. Although the exterior of the building has changed considerably through the years, the old log walls placed there more than a century ago are still behind the modern facade. The interior reveals wide door-Jambs of original wood, and a staircase leading to the second floor has remained unaltered.

The California House was once the site of a civil war skirmish. Although the

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Count Casimir Pulaski



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Early History

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Pippin Place now sits in quiet seclusion. There was a time when it was filled with the bustle and laughter of people. Those were the days when it was a modern river resort, one of the first in the Ozarks.

The house was built by Bland N. Pippin, who bought the 40-acre tract of land from his Uncle Sol Bartlett, a pioneer miller. Pippin grew up in this area and often carried bags of corn on horseback to his Uncle's mill where the corn was ground into meal. He resolved that one day, if he ever had the money, he would own those forty acres.

In 1911, his dream came true. Pippin was a very imaginative and creative man, and he built the house from materials found on the land. The native stone was picked up nearby, and the sycamore framework was cut from the trees growing there. Pippin's originality is shown also in the open beams on the inside of the building where the wood still retains its bark.

Pippin Place was completed in 1914 and became one of the first modern resorts in the Ozarks. The house had running water, sewage disposal, and electric lights generated by the mill, which could generate five kilowatts of electricity.

The Frisco Railroad ran special trains to Crocker to accommodate visitors to Pippin Place. Bill Mace, who lived near, would meet the trains and transport the guests by buggy to the big house.

In 1918, the house was enlarged by extending the west wing on the back side. In the next few years, Pippin Place became well known as one of the outstanding places in America. The old register shows the names of many famous men.

Mrs. Pippin ran the resort until 1952, when her son and his wife bought the adjoining farm, enlarged the operation, and ran it until it was sold in 1969 to John Laughlin.

The younger Pippin summed up his family's feelings for the old place. "Since those early days," he said, "Deterioration set in because there wasn't that love. But, who knows? Maybe out of the ashes and pride of the former generations will arise the preservation of a landmark!" Those feelings are echoed by the Laughlins, who restored the beauty of Pippin Place and opened up the guest rooms as apartments.

When the San Francisco Railroad pioneered its way across the country. It left in its wake lonely depots erected in desolate territory. But around these depots soon

sprang communities, and the Frisco Depot of Crocker, built in 1869, is no exception.

The first building to be erected, after the depot was built by J.A. Flippin in 1870 and a year later Joseph Fiebelman built his store. Soon, the area had become a community and one of the first shipping points in the county, serving Waynesville, Iberia, Brumley, Toronto, and Hawkeye.

The shipments consisted chiefly of poultry, eggs, dried apples and peaches, furs, hides, and wild game. The depot which is a Crocker landmark, is now used for storage.

The present Pulaski County Courthouse is the fourth to have served the county since its organization in 1818. Built in 1903 in Romanesque Revival Style, this structure was submitted to the National Register for Historical Places.

The first courthouse was built in 1840 on an acre of land donated by William Moore, and designated by "a stake drove down in sinter of said lot." Construction workers camped out for two weeks to complete the two story Hewn-log structure that held a single glass window and office space upstairs for the County Clerk.

In 1843, Waynesville was determined to build a courthouse in "Fashionable Style" on what is now the present site of the courthouse. This structure was to work for the county throughout the Civil War, but because of damages caused by Union troops, it was condemned soon after.

During that war, the people of Pulaski County were divided in their allegiance, but being slave owners generally, they leaned more toward the confederacy.

On June 7, 1862, Waynesville was invaded by Col. Franz Sigel and his Union troops, who took over the courthouse and the Old Stagecoach Depot across the street to house their wounded. Almost immediately the soldiers went to work on a Fort south of town to hold off any advancing Confederates. The ruins of that fort could still be seen within the last 25 years. At the war's end, the soldiers left, and Pulaski County began putting itself back together. Almost depopulated by men because of the war, only women and children were left to carry on for the most part. Only the completion of the railroad in 1867 increased immigration and started a gradual but steady regrowth of the county.

By 1880, there were 7,200 people in Pulaski County and by 1888 that number had increased to 10,000.

In the early part of 1872, the county court took a close look at the war damaged courthouse. Circuit Court Judge Elijah Perry entered an order on record that condemned the structure as being in a "dilapidated and dangerous condition, and beyond repairs and no longer safe as a place for holding court." In April of that year, the General Assembly of the State appropriated \$2,000 because of "damages to the courthouse of Pulaski County during and by reason of the late war." The money was to be used for "building a new courthouse on the public square in the town of Waynesville." But this third Pulaski County courthouse was struck by lightning on the night of June 13th, 1903. Exactly 80 years ago this year. Through this "act of God," only the walls were left standing. Fortunately for the county, the clerk was able to salvage the records and business went on almost as usual.

The June 14, 1903 issue of the Pulaski County Democrat newspaper told of local interest in moving the County Seat to Richland after the fire... but the following week, the same newspaper revealed that all of this was idle talk. Richland, it was said, did not even want the County Seat.

At the first session following the fire, the county court met on the lawn of the square in Waynesville to assess the damage. Present at that session was an architect, H.H. Hohenschild. Whose report to the court was that the "said walls are worthless and unfit for repair and that said walls cannot be repaired." Based on that report, the county court Judges Berry, Curtis, and Harvey drew up a contract to build a new brick courthouse. Edward Long was chosen as contractor and William Mitchell was the builder.

This new courthouse, the fourth for Pulaski County, was completed that same year. When the county began operation in its new red brick building, it became a matter of record that the doors would remain open at all times to any religious sects, as long as they believed in the "Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures."

The building has remained virtually unaltered during its years of operation. Paneling has been added and some ceilings were dropped to accommodate new central heating but the original wood frames, trim and baseboards remain.

The Pulaski County Historical Society won the battle to save the elaborate English Oak ceiling of the courtroom upstairs when the court argued that the room was cold with the high ceilings. This look at Pulaski County history is reprinted by permission of Clint

Flowers with the Lake of the Ozarks Council of Local Governments. It is an excerpt from their publication, "From These Beginnings," which is available by mail for \$3.75 per copy from the Lake of the Ozarks Council of Local Governments, Box 786, Camdenton, Missouri 65020.

"From these Beginnings" features 45 historic places in the Missouri Ozarks including Ha Ha Tonka in Camden County, Bland House and Laclede Jail in Laclede County, Bagnall Dam and Willmore Lodge in Miller County and Ratcliff House and the Morgan

County Poorhouse in Morgan County. Illustrations and photographs of each site have been researched extensively and contributors to the publication were Launa Jones, Wally Nickel, Peggy Fancher, Roger Dillon, Pat Callahan, Chris Lefferts, and "Dutch" Thomas.

Pulaski County Organizes; Waynesville Is County Seat

1833. Pulaski County organized at a meeting held at the Jesse Bileau's residence.

The new county includes parts of Dallas, Webster, Texas, Phelps, Maries, Miller and Camden, with all of the present Pulaski, Laclede and Wright county

area. The Circuit Court was called in March to be held at Green Williams residence, located on Bear Creek.

Earliest Commissions for Justices of Peace: Jacob Newman, Median F. Smith, S.A. Blevens-Cullen Township; Andres Bilyou, Isaac Clark, John King and

John Jones, Tavern Township; John Carby, Josuha Sweeny, Wilson Township; Lebon Ivey, R.B. Harrison and Aaron Spann, Liberty Township

E.C. Moore, Osage Township; Wilson Lenow, William Bradford, Piney Township; Henry Ormsby, John McElroy, Wilson Bell, Boone Township; Robert Montgomery, Gasconade Township; Daniel Fulbright, Harmony Township.

Aug. 1833. Hon. Charles Allen, Judge of Circuit Court; Robert Harrison, Clerk and recorder; Sheriff. James Campbell, furnished bond of \$5,000 through J.D. Fulbright, J.O. Gillispy, Robert Montgomery, G.B. Williams and Alfred Givens; Prosecuting attorney was Thomas Givens. Cases tried in the court, the first day of the session:

1. An appeal from a justice court; C.W. Himes against Reuben Sullins, in which the court reversed the justice's decision and gave Mr. Himes \$1 and the cost to be recovered from Mr. Sullins.

2. Benjamin Jones tried for larceny, indicted.

3. Archibald McDonald for maiming William Black, verdict unobtainable.

THIRD ANNUAL OLD SETTLERS DAY PICNIC, JULY 23, 1983, COMMUNITY BETTERMENT COUNCIL

- 10 A.M. — Settler's Day Picnic begins. Opening statements by General Charles J. Fiala, Representative Jim Mitchell and Mayor George Wheeler; Gun salute by the Kickapoo Trace Muzzle Loaders; Tomahawk and Knife Throwing by the Kickapoo Trace Muzzle Loaders; Sign up for horseshoe pitching in the horseshoe pits.
- 11 A.M. — Revival by the Fort Leonard Wood Chaplains; Demonstration of crime dogs by Waynesville Police and Military Police; Horseshoe pitching contest begins.
- 12 NOON — Costume judging contest; Creative circle will hold a drawing.
- 1 P.M. — Sack races for the children; Revival by the Fort Leonard Wood Chaplains; Shawn Pitman.
- 2 P.M. — Dog demonstrations by Waynesville Police and Military Police.
- 3 P.M. — Shrine Wives give away two Colonial Miss Dolls; Kickapoo Trace Muzzle Loaders give away one quilt and rifle; Revival by Fort Wood Chaplains.
- 3:30 P.M. — Sinkin Creek Bluegrass Music.
- 5 P.M. — Flying Fez is giving away a vacuum; Revival by Fort Wood Chaplains; NFFE Local 738 give away stuffed animal.
- 5:30 P.M. — Creative circle give away.

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