



Pictured here is the 1916 class of the Crocker High School preparing to go on their annual school hay ride. Pictured left to right standing: Clara Bort, Beulah Elder, Earl Lumpkin, Lelah Smith, Florence Bort, Zilpha Carmack, Edna Johnson, Walter Johnson, Mabel Ousley, Nanna Mitchell, Leah Neal. Seated: Everett Carmack, Lawrence Tutt, Alvin Trippe, Roy Smith, Ethel MacFarlane, Agnes Jones, George Hoops, Prof. Trippe, Robert Hawkins, Bland Tutt, Gertrude Newcomb, Fern Hendricks, Edith MacFarlane, Nellie Stites, Clella Carmack.

"Bank of Niangua" Linked To Counterfeit Money

By J.B. King

Editor's Note: The "Bank of Niangua" mentioned in the following article has no connection with any present day bank or financial institution.

The early history of a region often becomes shrouded in deep mystery and Pulaski County in the early 1800s conforms to the rule. Detailed factual accounts of major events in early Pulaski County history are scarce and yet from the few accounts that are available a reasonable yarn begins to develop. Such a story concerns the "Bank of Niangua" which was formed in Pulaski County around 1833. The "Bank" found mention in five separate historical sources and while none of the five sources completely agree as to all of the details the basic plot remains about the same.

When the "Bank of Niangua" was formed in 1833 the headquarters of the organization was listed as in Pulaski County near the small town of Waynesville. For convenience a major branch office was located in St. Louis. At first glance the "Bank" appeared to be a

solid business. It had a bank president, a cashier, clerks and a board of directors. For several years, to the delight of citizens in that era, the "Bank" appeared to be a dividends on deposits. But as people were to find out later these dividends were paid with counterfeit notes and fake Mexican silver dollars.

The leader of the "Bank of Niangua" was generally named as one John Avy. His organization operated from caves and cabins in the hills to the north of Waynesville in territory now occupied by Pulaski and Camden County. Due to the large number of counterfeiters and their lawless friends they continued to operate for several years without difficulty from law enforcement officials and those people in the territory who supported law and order. But by the early 1840s the boldness of the criminal element had increased to the point where life and property were not safe.

Honest settlers in the territory reacted by forming a group known as the "Slickers." This title came from their habit of securing a member of the outlaw class

to a blackjack tree and whipping or "slickering" him with hickory branches. The outlaw was then given the suggestion that even worse things could happen to him if he remained in the territory past a certain time limit. Alarmed at the loss of valuable manpower and the threat to their secure base of operations the counterfeiters and their friends formed the "Anti-Slicker" organization to combat the honest citizen element and warfare between the two groups continued for some time.

Members of the "Slicker" group found their ranks infested with spies reporting to the criminal elements and the group made slow progress at first. With the help of the spies and the wealth brought in by the counterfeit operation the "anti-slicker" group continued to have the upper hand in manpower and even political power within the territory.

Then misfortune fell upon the "Bank of Niangua," a member of the board of directors died. Within a few months his widow found that "her share" of the profits had been stopped and she went before the "Bank" and

demanding the money which she felt was rightfully hers. The "Bank" refused to honor

her request. Once again in the pages of history the fury of a woman scorned blazed up and brought great changes. The widow went to St. Louis and contacted federal officials with her story of the counterfeit "Bank of Niangua."

Following a short investigation, the federal officials closed the branch office in St. Louis and sent a group of officers to Pulaski County to secure the rest of the band. With the help of the widow, John Avy was identified and arrested. Upon his arrest Avy promptly agreed to help in the capture of the remainder of his gang and a roundup began. Historical accounts differ but it seems probable that at least two of the counterfeiters were killed in gunfights rather than face capture. The counterfeit plant was destroyed. The printing press, copper plates, papers and other supplies were either seized as evidence or hidden by the outlaws.

With the criminal element shaken by the fact that their boss had turned against them and the loss of their wealth and power base, the remaining outlaws were unable to reorganize to combat the "slickers" who recognized their stroke of good fortune and promptly began to work overtime at their appointed task.

Those men the "Slickers" felt were part of the gang were driven from the territory. Those men they felt had been fooled by the gang were permitted to remain with the stern warning that their future conduct would be required to be one of complete trust and honesty.

With the "Slickers" in control of the territory citizens again began to raise

their children and grandchildren in a law-abiding territory. As these children grew so faded from the history of Camden and Pulaski County the account of the "Bank of Niangua."

Vigilantes Slay Outlaw Band At Geyer Cave

Geyer Cave, so named for the family who once owned the farm on which it is located, is one of the larger caves of Pulaski County and is located about three miles from Richland on the Gasconade River. Used by wild animals and Indians in the primitive years, later it became the meeting place and the shelter of Bushwhackers.

It was the last hangout for a big band of outlaws. They used the mouth of the cave as a place to rendezvous and sleep. From this point they raided the country, terrorizing women and children. Finally, when the soldiers came home from the War, they formed a band of vigilantes to root them out. They elected S.J. Manes their captain, and they formed a plan for raiding the hangout. They went to the cave in the middle of the night. S.J. advised that they wait till daylight. Here were his whispered instructions, "Wait till the first man wakes and rises, there is always one who wakes first. When he gets up, I'll shoot. Then as the rest of them jump up, each of you get your man." The men surrounded the mouth of the cave and it happened just as their leader had predicted. Every one of them were shot down, cleaned out like a den of rattlesnakes.

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