

DEPOT TESTIMONIAL

By H. Gene Sooter

Dr. G. Byron Smith is a name almost synonymous with Iberia. It was Dr. Smith and his wife, Mabel, who founded the now defunct Iberia Academy and Junior College. Dr. Smith was president of the school from its beginning until the late 1940's.

While there are many others who could write much more about Dr. Smith than I, my interest at this particular time has been generated by the efforts of the citizens of Crocker to move the Old Frisco Railroad Depot from its present location on railroad property to a more permanent site to be used as a community center and railroad museum. As the project has matured, it has gathered financial assistance and encouragement from many surrounding communities. It occurred to me that Iberia, through G. Byron Smith, benefited from the railroad through Crocker as any other area community.

Financing an educational institution in a small town such as Iberia was a monumental task. It is true that Iberia Academy was financed, thanks to the Smiths, by an endowment fund. However, the money generated by the endowment fund, tuition fees, fees for room and board, and from local contributions seemed never to provide enough money to maintain an in-

stitution of the scope of Iberia Academy.

It was often necessary for Dr. Smith to seek aid elsewhere. So, periodically, he would take a trip to secure financing to keep the little school solvent. In order for Dr. Smith to reach the Frisco Depot in Crocker to buy train fare and to board the train for his finance-seeking trips, he would ride a "mail hack" from Iberia.

Many times he would travel only as far as St. Louis. There he would visit the Danforth family, who were and still are owners of Ralston-Purina, and would also contact the Pilgrim Congregational Church. Both of these usually came through with financial aid for the school. It was virtually impossible to reject Dr. Smith's persuasive plea for funds when he explained the dire need of the young folk who sought education at the academy.

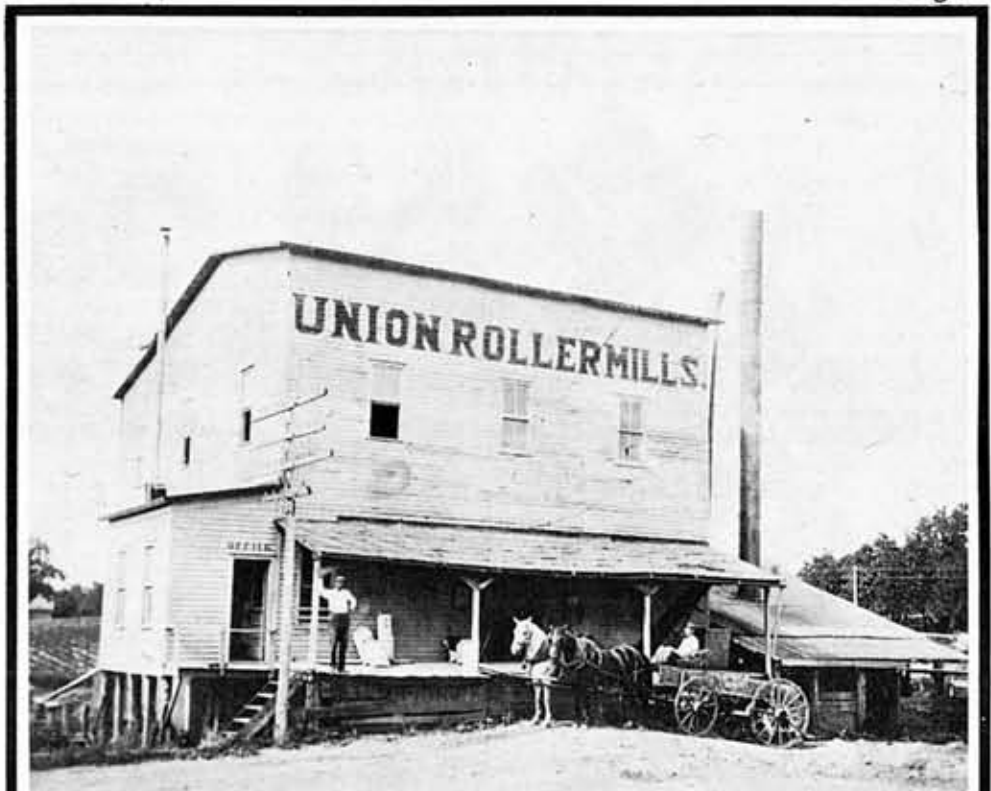
The story is told of one such trip which turned out much differently from most of Dr. Smith's quests for money for the little school. At this particular occasion, the train was more crowded than usual when Smith boarded and he found only one vacant seat next to a gentleman who appeared quite successful. As the train progressed toward St. Louis, the two men became engaged in conversation.

Professor Smith, as he was affectionately known to most people in the Iberia area, learned that the gentleman seated next to him was a very successful businessman from Dallas, Texas.

Naturally, Dr. Smith told his new found friend about Iberia Academy and Junior College and regaled him with the virtues and important work the school was accomplishing. As the famous "Texas Flier" sped along its way, talk about the academy became more and more animated. By the time the train had reached the St. Louis station, Professor Smith had convinced his companion that his little school in the Ozarks was the Athens of Missouri.

As the men stepped from the train, the Texas businessman asked Smith to wait for him. The wait was well worth it, because the man returned to hand Dr. Smith a check made out to Iberia Academy for the amount Professor Smith had hoped to raise in St. Louis.

"I just made a telephone call to the pastor of Pilgrim Congregation Church to verify all the things you have told me about your wonderful school," explained the businessman. "Not only did he substantiate all the things you have told me, but he could not say enough nice things about you. I am happy



Union Roller Mills stood at the corner of Third and Locust Streets in Dixon.

(Photo Furnished By Lois Kreiser)

to make this contribution to your school. I know you will use the money wisely to help those young people get an education."

Before the astonished Dr. Smith had time to thank the businessman properly, he disappeared in the crowd. Dr. Smith promptly boarded the next train to Crocker with a nice check to continue the fine work of the Iberia Academy.

This is but one story about the Old Frisco Depot in Crocker. Other people have their own memories and stories about the depot. So, it is no wonder that the citizens of Crocker want to preserve the nostalgia, history, and memories of the past in the "Old Depot" for their children and all posterity.

EXPLOSION AT IBERIA MILL

A lazy summer day in 1907 erupted into turmoil when an explosion ripped through the Iberia Mill in Iberia, Missouri.

It was nine o'clock in the morning on July 10th. The owner of the mill, H. M. Garner and his son, Leslie, had climbed to the top of the mill to repair some machinery. Suddenly, an explosion. Pressure had been building in the mill's boiler and it proved too much.

The explosion tore away the entire engine room, boiler, and engine. The entire part of the mill next to the engine room was torn out, including part of the roof. The explosion scattered timber, scrap iron, stones, and debris all over Iberia. The boiler's flue dropped down through Scagg's Store. The blast shattered plate glass windows at the bank and at Casey's store.

While there were four persons in the mill at the time of the explosion and Mr. Garner and his son were on the roof, no one was injured.

(Mr. Sooter was born in Iberia. He and his wife, the former Betty Mallette, daughter of the late Dr. Mallette of Crocker, taught school together. Mr. Sooter was a teacher and a Baptist minister in Crocker. The Sooter's have retired in Crocker.)

Editor's Note: Though not substantiated, it is rumored and certainly believed by many that the successful businessman who wrote Dr. Smith the check on that particular trip to St. Louis was none other than the famous business tycoon, H.L. Hunt.

RAILROAD PROVES TO BE BOON

With the exception of the establishment of Fort Leonard Wood, the advent of the Frisco Railroad was the most important factor affecting the growth and prosperity of Pulaski County.

Prior to the Civil War, a railroad line was under construction through Pulaski County, south of what is now I-44. The outbreak of the war interrupted its progress. After the war, this southern route was abandoned and a more northern route through the county was constructed. All along this route, houses, businesses, and communities sprang up.

One of the communities prospering the most was Crocker, a town that received a big boost on July 18, 1907, when officials of Frisco Railroad Company announced Crocker would

become a division point along the line. The community of Newburg had been a division point up until this time. While the decision was a catastrophe for Newburg, it was good news for residents of Crocker.

Interested parties in Crocker estimated that the community would leapfrog into a city of 1500 or 2000 persons within eighteen months. Land prices skyrocketed in anticipation of the expected boom.

Frisco officials said they intended to cut out a nine mile length in the Dixon Hill. The road would make a cut from Crocker to Rolla, leaving out Newburg and other intermediate stations. Estimated cost of this improvement and the laying down of double tracks between St. Louis and Springfield was \$1,700,000.

CHEAP LAND FOR SALE (IN 1888)

If someone offered to sell you land today for ten dollars an acre, you'd be figuring it was contaminated to the gills with dioxin. Yet, back in 1888, ten dollars an acre was a fair price for land.

A realtor's ad in "The New Era" newspaper in January of 1888 listed a 160-acre farm near Dixon with log buildings, spring water, and 70-acres in cultivation for just \$10 an acre. That was the price per acre of another 160-acre farm near Dixon, which had 100 acres in

cultivation.

Or, if you wanted 1100 acres of the finest stock ranch land in Pulaski County, you had to pay just \$6 per acre.

Unimproved timber land could be purchased for three dollars an acre. However, the choicest of farm land complete with 12-room house, large barn, and outbuildings could cost as much as \$40 per acre.

Financing, when available, was pegged at 7 per cent interest.

Your.
American Family
Agent
AMERICAN FAMILY
INSURANCE
AUTO HOME BUSINESS HEALTH LIFE

Jim Arnold
AGENCY
Downtown Waynesville
774-2745

AUTO-LIFE-HOMEOWNERS
-MOBILE HOMEOWNERS
-FIRE & EC - DWELLING OWNERS
-DISABILITY INCOME
-FAMILY HEALTHCARE
-MAJOR MEDICAL - HOSPITAL INCOME
-EMPLOYEE SECURITY PLAN
-FAMILY ACCIDENT -
-FAMILY ACCIDENT - TRIP & SPORTSMAN
-BOATOWNERS - SNOWMOBILE
-MOTORCYCLE - LOW COST LOANS
-BUSINESS INSURANCE