

NEWBURG'S FIRST 100 YEARS!

Fifty years before Newburg was platted especially as a Division Point for the Frisco Railroad, there was an early settlement on its site. In 1821, Missouri had been admitted to the Union as a slave state and its western boundary marked the

William and Lindsey Coppedge settled on Bean Ridge where it looked down both to the Little Piney Valley and the Branch; but there seems to have been Coppedges all over what later was to become Phelps County. There is a Coppedge Creek north of St. James.

by Mary Alice Beemer
(Condensed by Van
Beydler)



frontier of the United States. As early as 1823, William Coppedge built his cabin on Bean Ridge (now generally spoken of as West Mountain), about halfway up the slope that later became Newburg's Second Street. Lindsey Coppedge came several years later to operate a store there; these were likely log buildings. In 1834 or 1835, (two dates are given) the Primitive Baptist Church was built close by, the very first church in the whole area which later became Phelps County. Thus, in the very early days of Missouri's statehood, there were at least two families, a church and a store on the site of what was to become Newburg about fifty years later. Bean Ridge levels out into a high plateau; its ridges reaching down to the Little Piney's valley, create Fores Holler, the Grotto Holler, Bum Holler and Moonshine Holler on the west of Newburg; north of it is Battle Mountain.

George Coppedge lived at the Meremac Iron Works in 1857, the year Phelps County was designated, and is credited with giving Rolla its name.

Very early in the 1800's, William C. York settled about two miles west of the Coppedge settlement and about two miles east of the Harrison settlement, Little Piney, (later Arlington), in a "holler" featuring a large spring. We now call it the Grotto. An inn was built there to accommodate teamsters following the oldest road in this part of the country. This old road, undoubtedly grubbed out with slave labor, crossed the Little Piney River at York's place and went on to the Little Piney settlement at the junction of the Little Piney with the Gasconade. The old inn is still in use today as a dwelling. It survived the Civil War, guerillas, bushwhackers, and the passage of time, and is now the home of Rod and Carol Brown. In 1883,

NEWBURG'S FIRST HUNDRED YEARS!

Mr. Knotwell bought the site and built hot blast furnaces there trying to revive the almost defunct Maramec Iron Works, which was failing after over sixty years continuous operation. About \$300,000 was sunk into the Knotwell effort, and in 1883, almost two thousand people lived there. A financial panic in 1883 contributed to the project's demise. 1883 was the year the town of Newburg, two miles east, was platted as a town site for the Frisco Division Point. According to the Rolla Weekly Herald's April 21st, 1883 issue, Phelps County's only hanging took place. "Today at 11:00 o'clock precisely, George Bohannon, the murderer of William Light, expiated his life on the gallows in the presence of an immense concourse of people. The crowd was estimated at 3,000." It took place in a pasture due west of the Rolla cemetery and due south of the Phelps County Court House. Rolla was about twenty-three years old. "The sheriffs of Dent, Texas, Pulaski and Maries Counties were here for the

execution. Bohannon stepped from the carriage and without assistance mounted the scaffold, manifesting no tendency to weaken. On the scaffold was the Reverend Mr. Bond, who, at the request of the prisoner delivered an address of nearly half an hour in length. He then sang the song, 'Show pity, Lord, Oh Lord, Forgive,' while the noose was adjusted around Bohannon's neck. With the coolness of the most indifferent spectator, Bohannon watched these proceedings. Whatever the grave faults of the unfortunate young man, cowardice was not a part of his being. "Sheriff Orchard then asked if he had anything to say; in a clearly audible and distinct voice, he said: 'Gentlemen, ladies and friends, I am here today to be executed. I am willing to die but wish to say I am not guilty as charged. I am not afraid to die. I wish to bid you all goodbye, and hope to meet you all in a better world. This I hope and pray to all of you and this is my speech.'" The trap door was then sprung. The body

of George Bohannon was buried in Temple Cemetery, also known as Lucky Cemetery, a pioneer cemetery located just off of Highway 66 in Doolittle. Bohannon was about twenty-two years of age and was said to have killed William Light in an argument which developed into a fight, presumably at the Pool Holler Cave.

With the end of the Civil War, railroad building began again reaching Dixon in early 1870. A four engine roundhouse was located at the top of the steep Dixon Hill in charge of Jerry Houston. Jerry's wife's parents, the W.H. Harris, owned and operated the Frisco Hotel in Dixon. In 1883, Frisco officials approached Rolla, asking for lands on which to build shops, a roundhouse and switchyards, since Rolla was about halfway between Springfield and St. Louis. After doubt the railroad operation would be permanent, Captain C.W. Rogers decided to go four miles west into the Little Piney Valley and build a new town there.

The first survey of the townsite was made in 1883 by William Painter, a young graduate of the Missouri School of Mines, newly located at Rolla. The first town plat, now on display at the Newburg Museum on Water Street, designated the town's name to be "Newburgh." Most of the people swarming into the new town from Knotwell, Dixon, and all over, however, preferred the name "Frisco." When the town petitioned the County Court to incorporate in 1888, the name Newburg, dropping the Painter's "H", was finally agreed upon.

The historic Houston House was originally called "The Railroad Hotel Eating House." It opened for business on January 1, 1884, the same day that the new brick roundhouse also opened. The many gabled building was built in 1883. Its floor plans include a diningroom built to accommodate a trainload of travellers. During the forty minute stopover for re-coaling and watering, passengers ate breakfast or dinners consisting of ham or bacon, eggs, hot

biscuits, gravy, canned fruit, pancakes and syrup, and coffee... all for twenty-five cents. The large diningroom was heated by a large woodburning fireplace built of cave rock. Kerosene lamps were hung around the walls and square oak tables held candles. At the closing of the dining room in 1981, after ninety eight years of almost continuous service under the same family, the atmosphere was changed little. The oil lamps are now electrically wired and the Houston House now has restrooms. The guest books feature many famous names. Ruth Deskin Moore was working at the Houston House in her teens (the early 20's) when a train pulled in bearing Hollywood actor Tom Mix and his famous horse, Tony. Ruth had the honor of serving Tom.

This area was full of resorts in the 30's and 40's. One of the most popular was Stonydell, on old Highway 66 at Arlington. Highway patrolmen stationed themselves there every weekend to direct traffic. Ray Wann, born and raised at Jerome, worked at

Stonydell when he was sixteen. His job was to kill and dress chickens for the day's dinners. One day a large black limousine pulled in and Mae West and her chauffeur, together with a large dog, got out. Ray cooked her dinner and served it with all the trimmings. Stonydell featured a large swimming pool... a great novelty in those days, dancing, tennis and boating and fishing in the adjacent Gasconade. The resort was razed when the new Interstate 44 was built. If you would like to purchase a copy of the book "Newburg's First Hundred Years-January First 1884-1984" by Mary Alice Beemer, send \$8.00 to Mary Alice Beemer, P.O. Box 374, Newburg, Missouri 65550.



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