



Romance of the Roubidoux

by Mabel Carver Taylor

Contributed by Mae Johnson

I grew up along Roubidoux Creek in the 1930s and fell in love with its history, its beauty, and its legends.

Most of the time the creek ran clear, cold, and neatly within its banks, but sometimes heavy rains caused it to become a raging torrent. It ribboned its way through the center of Waynesville, Missouri, dividing the town in half. It ran under the concrete bridge which spliced the strands of Highway 66 and down to the swimming hole marked by the remains of an old bridge pier. Here on hot summer days the kids on our block cooled off in the frigid waters. It took a large measure of courage for us to hold our breaths and take the first plunge. After that the refreshing dip was sheer joy.

At some points along the creek high bluffs over-shadow the water, and caves here and there once served as shelters for Indians who roamed the rugged terrain. A lively imagination can almost envision Indian lookout points all along the cliffs and hear the low sound of tom-toms beating in the stir of wind through the trees.

A historic marker on Waynesville's court house square notes that Cherokee Indians camped near the Roubidoux on

their "Trail of Tears" trek to Oklahoma in 1837.

Even before that, in 1826, a grain mill was built on the banks of the creek, and as settlers moved in along the stream, the town began to take shape. Outbreaks of malaria forced the early pioneers to move to higher ground and build log houses on the hills above the Roubidoux, leaving some of the rich bottom land for farming.

Mabel Manes Mottaz, in *Lest We Forget*, a history of Pulaski County, Missouri, and Fort Leonard Wood, states: "Joseph Roubidoux came through here and paused long enough to leave his name on the creek that flows through Waynesville and which to this day bears the name of the Roubidoux Creek."

Joseph Robidoux was a fur trader born in St. Louis in 1783. He and three of his brothers were early explorers and trappers. After prospering at a trading post he established at the junction of Blacksnake Creek and the Missouri River, Joseph Robidoux has his land holdings surveyed into lots and established St. Joseph, Missouri in 1842.

In *Memorial to the Robidoux Brothers*, Orral Messmore Robidoux explains that the

name is sometimes spelled Robidou or Roubidou.

One-fourth mile upstream from the Highway 66 bridge, but still within Waynesville's city limits, Roubidoux Spring empties millions of gallons of sparkling clear water per day into the creek. The Missouri Conservation Department's booklet, "Missouri Ozark Waterways," reveals that the discharge of this magnificent spring varies from three to forty-seven million gallons daily. At flood stage the spring may be covered by up to ten feet of water, but the spring's discharge also increases enough to provide a boil more than three feet above the flood stage of the creek, according to *Springs of Missouri* by Jerry Vineyard and Gerald Feder. They state that the Roubidoux Spring rises from a shallow cave filled with rocks that are churned about and slowly disintegrated by friction. Visitors continually throwing rocks into the spring keep the supply fairly constant.

The creek does not run free flowing from its headwaters to the Gasconade River as one might assume after seeing the Roubidoux below the spring. In fact, there is a stretch of about fifteen river miles where the

creek sinks into its gravel bed for most of each year. Permanent flow of the creek starts about one mile southeast of the spring.

The last two and a half miles of the Roubidoux before it empties into the Gasconade River are designated as a trout management area. Here the water is cold and easily accessible. Usually it is clear. The State Department of Conservation begins stocking a scheduled total of 8,000 rainbow trout in February and continues at intervals until the water runs low in summer. Stocking is resumed in the fall and continues through October.

Trout season is open throughout the year on the Roubidoux, and the stream always holds a good supply of trout. Since the creek is inside Waynesville's boundaries with the convenience of nearby motels and a recreational vehicle park, as well as city parks for outdoor cooking, anglers from St. Louis and Kansas City regularly join local fishermen in trying for their limit.

In many places the creek banks are low and flat, providing an easy place to walk and explore. As a child the first warm days of spring afforded an opportunity for me to go down by the creek to see what

was taking place. Often the ravages of winter had changed the course of the stream. But always the greening of new spring was very evident along the water's edge. Cress, after taking a rest during the cold weather, once again became lush in the shallows. Blooms on the willow trees stood upright in clusters, adding their yellow-green touch to the scene.

One day when I was alone with nothing particular to do, I walked along kicking up stones and looking for birds. It was nesting time and I could see several different kinds of birds flitting among thickets that grew along the creek. Occasionally a bright plumed creature would dart through the trees. Tapestries of moss grew thick and green on tree bark and rocks, and there was pungent fragrance of damp earth in the fresh, cool air.

Silence in the woods was broken only by a squirrel scampering across a rotten log and by the gentle flow of the water nearby. My feet made scarcely a sound on the thick undergrowth as I looked for nature's treasures.

Trees were taller and closer together now, providing a large, shady area, sheltered and secluded. Then I looked down,

and there, nestled close to the ground like a giant display of jewels, was the most beautiful garden of wild violets I had ever seen. Hundreds of purple blossoms stood out in relief against luxuriant heart-shaped leaves. Here in this quiet place I had come up on one of God's wondrous surprises.

Sometimes with copious rains the creek overflowed its banks, quickly rising in a whirling rampage. Once I remember water came up in the vacant field across the street from our house. This is where tent revival meetings, traveling stock shows and sometimes medicine shows or circuses were held on warm summer evenings. Across the creek, water occasionally overflowed the city park, site of Waynesville's annual homecoming picnic.

Waynesville has grown and some of the old landmarks are gone. But the Roubidoux still flows on course to merge with the Gasconade River, a short distance north of Waynesville's city limits. Rugged bluffs still overlook the creek, and wooded areas are here and there along its banks. Perhaps violets still bloom along the Roubidoux and children still find them and build memories to enjoy the rest of their lives.



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