

The Founding of Newburg, 1882-1885

Compiled and written by John F. Bradbury, Jr.

Newburg was the last town in Phelps County to be created as a result of railroad activity. It followed Rosati, (Knobview), St. James, Dillon, Rolla, Arlington, and Jerome, all of which predate Newburg by at least fifteen years. But Newburg, unlike the other communities, was founded by the St. Louis and San Francisco (Frisco) line solely for railroad purposes. The company created Newburg from scratch in bottomland of the Little Piney in 1883-1884. In a year's time, the population increased from a single family to a thriving community of over four hundred people.

The Little Piney valley had in earlier times been the site of various other enterprises. James and Lovisa Harrison located in 1819 at the confluence with the Gasconade River. Upstream, at the future site of Newburg, William Coppedge and his family settled in the 1820s, followed by William York, later one of the earliest judges of the Phelps County court. York's "Station," located near the mouth of Mill Creek, was a stop on the stage route to Springfield during the 1850s, and during the Civil War, was the rendezvous point for Union cavalymen who escorted military and civilian wagon trains westward. Also during the war, Colonel Sempronious H. Boyd's 24th Missouri Infantry regiment encamped on the future location of the railyards. The first rails laid in the Piney valley ar-



July 4th celebration at the Houston House in Newburg. (Photo courtesy of Carol Muennig)

rived in 1867 as the South West Pacific railroad built to the Gasconade at Arlington (formerly Little Piney) before the company bankrupted itself. The railroad created possibilities for heavy industry, which led William James to build Ozark Iron Works across the tracks from William York's old stage

stop. The Ozark works, of which the remains of the furnace can still be seen west of Newburg, brought many iron workers, teamsters, charcoal makers and laborers to the valley. The works seemed to be a promising development, but the enterprise collapsed with William James' bankruptcy in

1877. There was a brief resumption of iron-making at Ozark in 1880, this time by the Knotwell Iron Company, but that operation closed too when the market price for iron fell to less than the cost of production at Ozark/-Knotwell.

The announcement in late 1882 by officials of the Frisco that the road's division point would be moved to Phelps County from Dixon was gratefully received by those who had been at the mercy of the boom-and-bust cycle at the iron works. The Frisco had just completed its own line into St. Louis after having for years shared tracks with the Pacific Railroad (the Missouri Pacific after 1876). The extra mileage eastward meant that the division point, where engines were fueled, watered and repaired, crews changed, and passengers fed, would have to be relocated. The immediate economic benefits for Phelps County were apparent, including steady employment and regular payrolls for many of its citizens and an increase in the tax base. Although there was interest in Rolla in having the railroad shops located there, it appears that the railroad company never seriously considered the county seat as a site for the division point.

Newburg's creation from the ground up is traced in the following compilation of stories from Rolla's weekly newspapers. Editor Horatio S. Herbert

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of the *Rolla Weekly Herald*, an old line Democratic paper, and the *Rolla New Era's* Walbridge Powell, an independent and "Greenbacker," rarely agreed on anything, but in the case of the new division point, they both began by expressing the same "sour grapes" sentiments that Rolla would have been a better location. Similarly, they both advised caution to real estate speculators, but came to be impressed by the Frisco's efforts at Newburg. Both men also enjoyed the advertising revenues for their papers generated by Newburg businesses. The newspapers' coverage began while the townsites was still a weed-covered field along the Little Piney.

ROLLA NEW ERA, October 14, 1882

Capt. C.W. Rogers, superintendent of the Frisco Line, passed through Rolla on Thursday last on his way home from a trip of inspection over the road. In reply to a question from Mr. Jos. Campbell, we heard him answer that the end of the first division would be put at the Jones' farm near Ozark Iron Works. To a question of E.W. Bishop as to whether he had ever refused to let them have land to put the end of the division on, he stated that the place selected possessed superior advantages over Rolla, being exactly in the center of the distance from St. Louis to Springfield, and that the engines would run in to that point from Dixon and Rolla without the consumption of any coal and would arrive cool at the end of the division. The Little Piney valley is very malarious, and surely human life is to be taken into some account in the location of the end of a division. Surveys are being made of a line from Jerome to Crocker that will shorten the distance six miles, and it would seem to us, that unless there is a big speculation behind the location, the company would certainly consult the health, comfort and welfare of their employees by locating the end of the division at Rolla where no spot in this section is healthier, where there are no better schools, or a cheaper place to live anywhere else in this section. While we concede that the railroad company should locate their divisions where it will subserve their interests, still we cannot but think Rolla possesses advantages over any other place and were the wishes of the railroad hands to be consulted they would almost unanimously declare for Rolla. Nearly everybody that lives on Little Piney from Arlington to Beaver Creek, are, or have been, more or less afflicted with the chills. A good siege of this by Capt. Rogers, would make him hesitate before he imperilled the lives of his employees by locating the end of the division inside a malarious district. There is also another reason. It would seem to us that it would be policy of the railroad to try and build up a town that has a good start like Rolla, and hope that efforts will be made to see whether the location is revocable or not. If the railroad company wishes to take into consideration the health and comfort of their families and the future of their children they will locate it at Rolla. If they do not, they will locate at Ozark.

ROLLA NEW ERA, November 18, 1882

Work has commenced eight miles west of this city on the Jones farm, for

the end of the First Division. This will be a calamity to Rolla as most of the river trade will go there or at the Iron Works. We could have had the division here, if proper effort had been made.

ROLLA WEEKLY HERALD, March 15, 1883

Stanford will be the name of the end of the railroad division, eight miles west of this place. The town will be located on a hill north of the railroad, while the machine shops and round house will be on the bottom lands south of the main track. Leland Stanford was a member of the Frisco's Board of Directors at the time.

ROLLA WEEKLY HERALD, June 14, 1883

Work on the round house at Stanford, two miles this side of Knotwell, will commence in a few days. It is said that material for the building has been ordered there. It is not a desirable place to live, but if it suits the railroad company others have no right to complain. Rolla would like to have secured the prize and perhaps would have secured it had a chance been given her.

ROLLA WEEKLY HERALD, June 28, 1883

"Newburgh" is to be the name of the

new division, not Stanford.

ROLLA NEW ERA, July 14, 1883

The lots at Newburgh are selling quite rapidly, about fifty of the choicest and best being already sold. The teams of Scott, the contractor, are rapidly leveling the knoll south of the railroad and spreading it over the valley to make the tracks safe from overflow.

ROLLA WEEKLY HERALD, July 19, 1883

(From the Dixon News) A large force of men are now engaged in grading the grounds for round-house and siding, at Newburg. The division will be moved to that place between now and January 1, 1884. Also the stockyards at Rolla, will be taken there. People should be very cautious in investing much money in property at that place, as there is no probability of it becoming more than a little village, composed of railroad employees and a few business houses. The location is a sickly one, and its general inaccessibility will prevent it from ever making a town of any importance, more than above mentioned. Dixon fears nothing from her new rival, and Rolla has too much the start to ever be caught by a town located in a malarious swamp, where it takes two sets of bull frogs to live through one season. Railroad man-

agers are not infallible, they make mistakes just the same as other human beings, notwithstanding, they have no souls. Our advice is to "go short", on Newburg real estate. The deal has too long a future before the margins will be realized. Life is too short, we cannot afford to wait.

ROLLA WEEKLY HERALD, August 2, 1883

Robert Brown, of this city, closed a contract with the railroad company on Saturday for burning 300,000 brick and laying them in the wall for round-house and machine shop at Newburg. The brick will be burnt at Newburg and work will be commenced this week.....

The contract for dressing the stone and laying the foundation of the railroad buildings at Newburg has been awarded to J.V. Maggi of our city. He commenced work yesterday morning.

ROLLA WEEKLY HERALD September 13, 1883

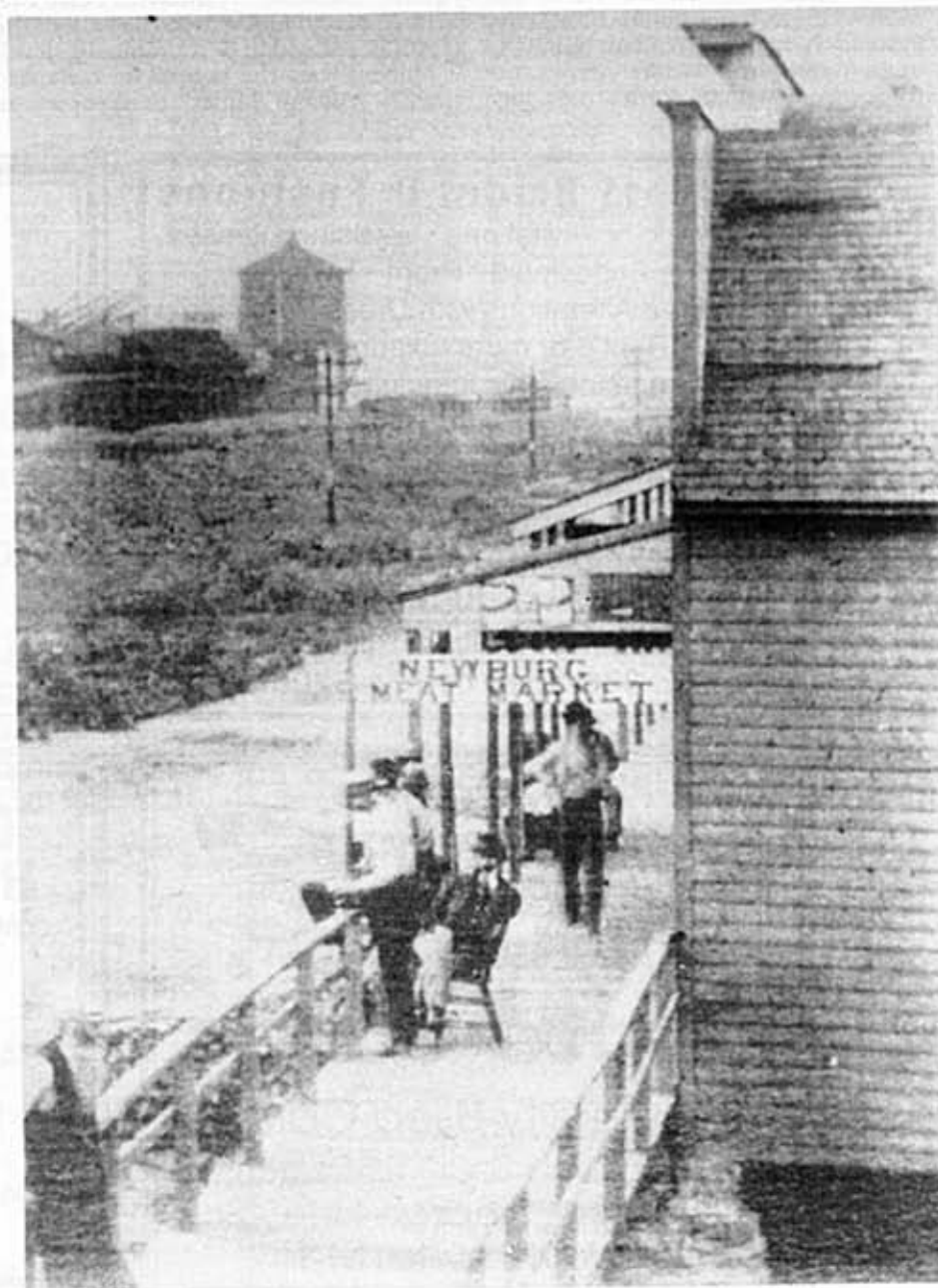
In company with J.V. Maggi we paid a visit to the new town of Newburg last Monday morning. With the exception of three houses which are being built by outside parties, there is nothing going on but the grading for the side tracks and other company work. Val. Allen has opened a butcher shop, and a man named White has followed in line with a stock of watermelons and candy. This is about completed and ready for the brick masons. This was a massive piece of work, requiring three times more stone than used on the Grant House. J.V. Maggi and his gang do a splendid job of it, giving great satisfaction. He commences next week on the foundation for the blacksmith shop. Robert Brown has a kiln of brick burning and another one nearly ready for the fire. J.A. Fiscus has the contract to lay the brick in the wall. The depot is a two-story frame and a very inferior building. It is not yet finished.

ROLLA NEW ERA, November 3, 1883

Where but a couple of months ago there was nothing but a log house in the middle of a hundred acre field, is now the embryo town of Newburgh. It is situated seven-and-a-half miles west of Rolla, and is the location of the First Division of the Frisco Line. The depot is nearly completed, a large two story building, and an agent and operator had (sic) charge.

The round house is a twelve stall house, and is 410 feet round, 20 feet high. The brick work on it is completed, and the wood work is being pushed rapidly forward, while the bricklayers are working on the blacksmith shop, a building 60 feet square and 18 feet high. The brick work is about done, and both houses is (sic) a good job and reflects credit on the contractors, Messrs. A.J. Fiscus and Jas. Robbins, who with a large force of men have put this job through in twenty-five working days. The amount of brick is about 240,000 kiln count, measure in the wall 300,000. J.V. Maggi of Rolla did the masonry and cut stone, also for the turn table and water tank. He will be through this week. The company is digging a large ditch from the Piney to admit the flow of water from the Piney into a large cistern from which it will be pumped into the tank and for other purposes.

Story continued on page 19



The Newburg Meat Market.

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Mr. Harris, of Dixon, is building a large hotel, which is now enclosed and under roof; the size of which is 28x50 feet, with an ell of 24x40 feet. It is two stories high with an attic, and will contain about 25 rooms....Newburgh will be dull until about New Years, when the division will be moved here, as Scott and his men leave in about ten days for Kansas and western Mo.

ROLLA NEW ERA, January 19, 1884

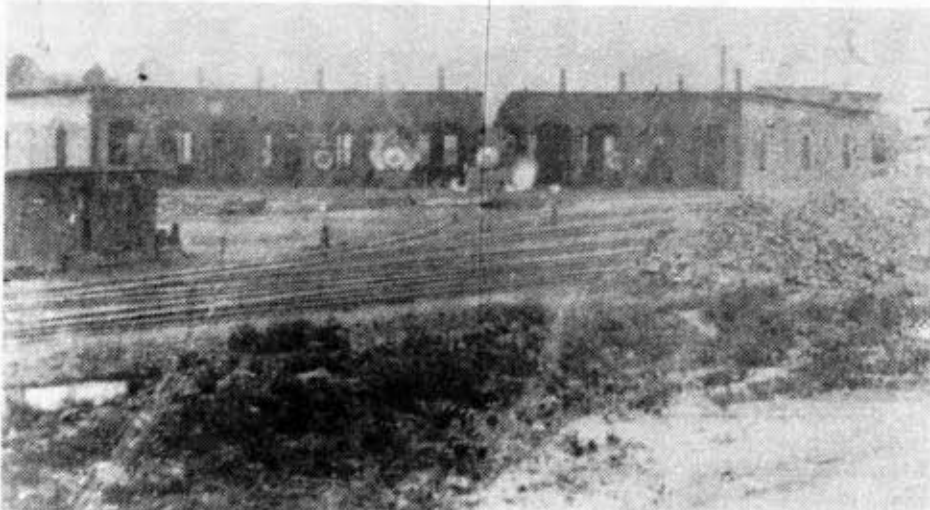
The railroad folks are about domiciled at last, but they have been very busy getting things to right. Supt. Houston of the round house has about 35 men under his charge as (engine) wipers, blacksmiths, etc., and men getting everything in apple pie order. In the blacksmith shop three fires will be run and steam lathe, drill presses and bolt machines and planer. Wm. Butler is engineer, and Chas. Murray and Clint Huckins as blacksmiths. The new tank holds 85,000 gallons of water and it took engineer Butler just seven hours to pump it full, now about five hours work each day keeps it full.....

As yet we have no post office, which is a great inconvenience. The postal department refuse to make an office there of the name of Newburg, but it seems to us that they could call the office "Frisco" or "Division" or anything so long as we have an office. Judge Murphy, of Dixon, as the Republican boss of this section has the matter in charge and we wish to the Lord he would hurry up and get us an office even if we have to call it Murphy.

We expect a boom in the building line in the spring, and with capitalists from Rolla to build us houses, we will soon have a live little town.....

ROLLA WEEKLY HERALD, January 24, 1884

We paid a visit to Newburg on Tuesday, the first since removal of the division to that place from Dixon, and were most favorably impressed with the great advancement. The railroad men are busily employed in putting things in proper shape for future convenience and when they get through our little neighbor will look like a "lilly



Newburg Roundhouse (Courtesy of Carol Muennig)

of the valley." The round house, under supervision of Mr. Houston, is a massive brick structure of twelve stalls, large, airy, and a model of neatness. Mr. Houston has about 35 men under his charge. Adjoining the round house is the blacksmith shop, also brick. In it stands the engine which pumps the water from the Piney river into a large tank, besides supplying power for other purposes. The tank holds 85,000 gallons and supplies water for all railroad uses in the place....Four side tracks running parallel with the main track are necessary for the making up of trains and switching...

The business portion of (Newburg) is in its infancy as yet, with glittering prospects in the future. New buildings are in the course of erection, and as soon as spring sets in many more will follow. Burnett and McMakin have a splendid stock of general merchandise and seem to be pleased with the trade. Burns and Co. supply the city with drugs, medicines, etc. and D.B.Evans has opened up a shoe shop. The Frisco House, with mine host W.H.Harris at the helm, is doing big business. Hr. H. has not yet quite finished the building owing to the cold snap, but will shortly have everything in apple pie order. Mr. Burwell, late bookkeeper at Knotwell, has erected a restaurant opposite the depot, and J.G.Braddish and his workmen are putting up a large hotel for Mrs. Sullivan. Until sidewalks are laid Newburg

will take the tin whistle for mud. The foresighted one(s) are already providing stilts for themselves when the thaw sets in. Others are laying in big invoices of liver pads and ague cakes.....

ROLLA WEEKLY HERALD, March 20, 1884

The Postmaster General, we understand, has consented to name the post office at Newburg "Newburg", and of course "Frisco" is numbered with the past.

ROLLA NEW ERA, April 5, 1884

Mr. J.G. Braddish, our builder and contractor, is building a residence for Mr. David Harris, and finishing up Mrs. Sullivan's hotel, and has contracts for building a business house for Hiram Jones, and residences for engineers Al. Wagner and Jno. Wecklerly and one for Supt. Houston. Newburg is on the boom just now.....

The spring which supplies the hydrants in town has been nicely walled up, and all that is required to start a mineral water boom for Newburg is an analysis of the water and its publication all over the land. Any of our hill springs will pan out well on analysis....

Engineer Carney has pulled down the old Rombauer mill at Jerome and brought it to this place and will build five houses for rent. Thus does our town boom onward. It is a pity that some of the buildings at Knotwell were not nearer this point...

A good many people employed here yet live in tents and little log cabins and what is strange they all say they have been remarkably free from colds....

ROLLA NEW ERA, July 12, 1884

Newburg is rapidly assuming the proportions of a city...The rapidity with which Newburg has grown is surprising. Less than half a year ago, one could have numbered the habitable dwellings upon the fingers of one hand, and now they stand tastefully arranged over an area of several acres....The citizens of Newburg look eagerly and expectantly forward to the day, and that not far distant, when extensive manufacturing interests will be represented here. Such is what we need to enable our young city to compete successfully with her elder sisters of the southwest, and a location more favored by nature for such enterprises would be hard to find.

The picnic on the Fourth was a success. Credit is due for the comparatively good order that prevailed during this entire day. An enjoyable dance, well attended, was given at the Newburg House, the night of the Fourth. Messrs. Storts, Hudgins and Kelly were our orators on the Fourth. They talked respectively of patriotism, Grangeism, and tariff oppression.....

ROLLA NEW ERA, October 25, 1884

Mr. J.J. LaClair is the new superintendent of the round house. General regret is felt among nearly all of our citizens that Mr. J.A.Houston, who has served this company so long and faithfully, should resign.....

ROLLA NEW ERA, December 13, 1884

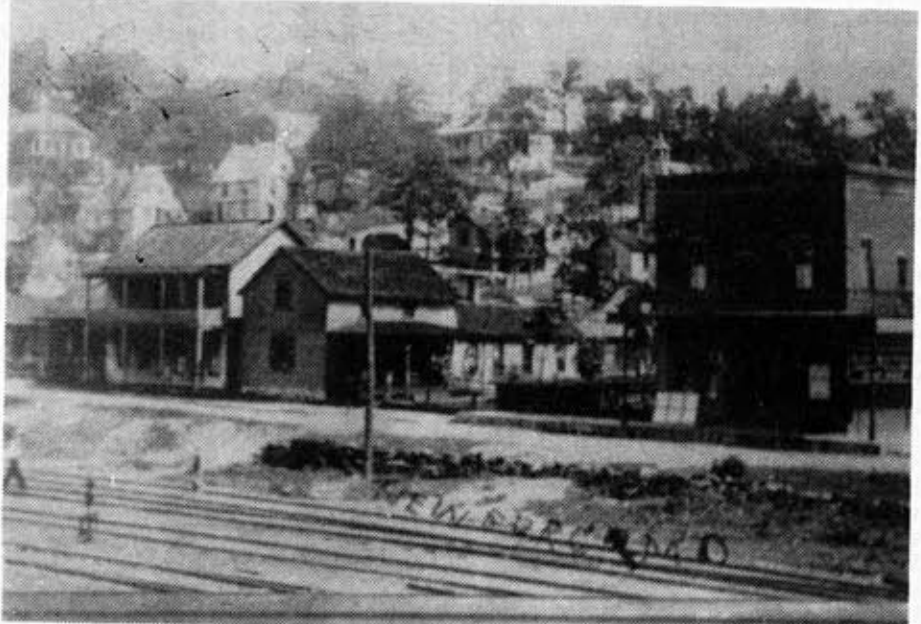
...Carney, the engineer, and owner of the livery stable here, is going to put in buggies and saddle horses in the spring so that our belles and beaux can meander over hills and dales, and whisper sweet nothings in each others ears, interspersed with an occasional spasmodic hug....

Alltogether (sic) Newburg has made a wonderful growth for the first year of its life.

So it was that Newburg in a few months went from merely an idea to a "live" little town which featured businesses, substantial homes, and the lodges of three fraternal organizations by 1885. The division point was an integral part of the Frisco's operations in Missouri. As trains grew larger and heavier at the end of the 19th century, the division point became increasingly more important as the base for auxiliary "helper" engines. Coupled on to the front and rear of heavy trains, the helper engines boosted traffic up over the steep grades of Hancock Hill to the west and Rolla hill to the east. At the summits of the hills, the helpers were cut off and drifted back down to Newburg to await the next train needing assistance. It was an operation which was repeated thousands of times until diesel engines, which are routinely operated in multiple lash-ups, replaced steam locomotives on the Frisco.

The finest hour of the Frisco, and Newburg as well, came during World War II. Like most American railroads, the Frisco was tested to the limit of its capacity by the demands of wartime freight and passenger traffic. Thousands of soldiers passed through Newburg on the way to Fort Leonard Wood or various ports of embarkation, and millions of gallons of Oklahoma oil and petroleum products passed through the division point to be funneled into the war effort.

Newburg fell on relatively hard times after the war. The Frisco was one of the first railroads completely to dieselize its locomotive fleet, which was accomplished by the early 1950s. The new engines could be run longer distances with less servicing, and the railroad company announced reductions in the labor force at various locations along the line. Newburg included. The roundhouse and turntable were removed, then most of the yard tracks, the depot and freight house. The process continued apace until today scarcely anything is left of the railroad's once dominant presence. Only the Newburg museum, in an old Frisco caboose, and the renowned fried chicken of the Houston House remain as testimonials to the glory days of railroading in Newburg.



Looking from across the tracks in Newburg.