



Tanner's Bathhouse

by Bonnie Howlett Bilisoly

This pioneer Ozark cabin is gone. It stood for years at the rear of Jim Tanner's two-story house in Richland, Mo. Nobody seemed to know the date the cabin was built or by whom. James, Jim Tanner's son, believes it dated from 1869.

The cabin was as old as Richland, or older, and had an interesting history, which soon may be forgotten.

Virgin oak trees and wilderness covered the land at the time the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad acquired the acreage. Godfrey Luthey subdivided the area into lots for Luthey's Addition. In 1881, by means of a mortgage, the portion where the cabin stood was purchased by J.A. Bradshaw, early Methodist Minister and Lawyer. He is reputed to have built the first residence in Richland.

In Richland, first settlers constructed businesses before dwellings. H.E. Warren, Sr. built his general merchandise store in 1869 with living quarters over the store. Other industrious men followed the same practice in those physically harsh times.

Bradshaw lost the cabin property by defaulting on his payments. Harrison E. Rollins, a single man, came into the property by trustee's deed. In 1888 J.A. Bradshaw again owned the property. In early 1890s he sold the place to John M. Eaton.

A tragic story happened while Eaton owned the property. Eaton was town marshal. He and a man named Musgrave carried an old grudge against each other. The two met, and shot it out on the dirt road of McClurg Avenue, about where Warren's Shoe Store is now. After John Eaton was hit, his son Dick Eaton joined in the fight. Musgrave also received a fatal shot.

Eaton and those helping him were trying to reach the cabin. They passed by the place where the Tanners then lived on East Washington. The two-story house was located on land now occupied by Richland Telephone Co. The late Eunice Tanner Tabor, oldest child of the late J.A. Tanner, remembered well the incident.

"Old man Eaton was shot bad," said Eunice. Eunice, a little girl at the time, vividly recalled his words and actions. "Eaton was crying, 'Oh, my God!'"

As the men passed, they ran for help to her mother, Alice Harrison Tanner. She gave them sheets to wrap and carry the wounded dying man. Eaton died that night.

"He was shot while fussing," said Eunice.

In 1904 the property was transferred by Sheriff's Deed from the estate of John M. Eaton to Richard Eaton. J.A. Tanner bought the proper-

ty from Dick Eaton. Eaton left town.

At that time the main house, in which Dick Eaton had lived, consisted of three rooms. The cabin, where John Eaton had lived, was one room. J.A. Tanner added lean-to rooms onto the cabin. The original cabin was used as a kitchen. One lean-to room became a smokehouse. In one corner Mr. Tanner hung his meat on long, iron hooks; another corner contained a square concrete receptacle into which fresh well-water was pumped to cool butter and milk. The cabin was somewhat of a dog-trot to the main house, but not attached by a roof. Eunice remembered many sizable oak trees about the grounds.

J.A. Tanner was a merchant in Richland, operating Tanner's Store from about 1906 until his store burned in 1930. Prior to 1915 he added a number of rooms and a second story to the main family home.

In the 1920s and '30s the cabin was used as a bathhouse by the Tanner family. Often a friend or a neighbor was invited to use the facilities for refreshing bathing. A real treat, Richland then lacked indoor plumbing.

A tank in the kitchen was filled for bathing by pumping water from a cistern in the kitchen of the main house. Members of family often looked into the tank to see how full the water was.

A metal plate in the firebox of the kitchen range heated the water in tank. By this connection with the cookstove the water was hot a good deal of the time. After use, the bathwater drained by pipe to the ground in back of the cabin. In winter the bathroom was heated by a small kitchen stove with four caps.

Dwight Roam, co-owner with brother Don of Roam Hardware in Richland, remembers taking baths in the bathhouse as a young boy. He enjoyed it. The tub extended a generous length, long for a tall man. Mr. Tanner purchased the tub from a barber shop in town. When indoor plumbing came to Richland, the Tanners placed the oversized tub inside the bathroom of the two-story house.

James, J.A. Tanner's youngest son, now owns the property. Retiring to the Ozarks from Montana, he has renovated the home place. The long tub sits in his yard. Some say it is a tub of value.

James tore down the cabin and built a storage building where the old cabin stood. One piece of cabin siding, added at one time or another, is special to the Tanners. The board is from a packing crate addressed and delivered to his father's store, and boldly printed in black paint with the name J.A. Tanner, Richland, Mo.

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