

HUMBOLT and CROCKER

By Nellie Stites Wills

(USED BY PERMISSION FROM THE BOOK, "THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS OF CROCKER, MO")

Before there was a Crocker, there was a Trading Post, of Humboldt about a mile northwest of Crocker near the present home of Irl Phillips.

The Humboldt Inn was reputed to have been haunted after a certain uncertain night. It all started when a weary traveler stopped at dusk seeking rest within its walls. At dawn, the floors were freshly scrubbed, the traveler gone. In his stead, remained a ghost. Thereafter, the well, (a likely burial place), was kept forever closed. Around the countryside, tall tales grew. At times, the dinner bell tolled the hour at two (A.M.) A blood curdling apparition flitted about by night. There were strange sounds and manifestations out of the ordinary, for sure, but really real??? The inn was later consumed by fire and so ended the ghostly habitat. After all, even ghosts must have houses in which to dwell. When required to operate in the open, they rebel.

In 1868, the Frisco Railroad was being finished to the east of Humboldt. A depot was started a mile southeast of the doomed-to-die Trading Post. Other temporary buildings were in use. A shipping center came into existence which would serve the inland towns of Waynesville, Iberia, Brumley, Toronto and Hawkeye. Early shipments included railroad ties, poultry, eggs, dried apples, dried peaches, furs, hides, game, rabbits, quail, deer and turkeys. Followed in time by cattle, mules, and hogs.

The new town was named for Eurillis J. Crocker, one of the stockholders of the railroad.

Mr. Alexander built a store of logs put together with pins which later became a part of the ware room of the Bostick and Johnson store. The Bank of Crocker stands in its place today. (1969)

In 1870, J.A. Flippin of Humboldt built what later became the Bostick Hotel and Saloon on the corner now occupied by Frey's Cafe in the I.O.O.F. building. In 1871, the polls were moved from Humboldt to Crocker at about the time of the completion of the beautiful hilltop brick residence built by Mr. Patterson. This was the home of Mr. and Mrs. C.H. Howard for many years. It has recently been purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Simpson who are restoring it for their home.

A general store was erected by Joseph Fielebman in 1871 on the corner where the Mallette building now stands. When he finished moving his stock of goods from Humboldt to Crocker, Humboldt became truly a ghost town. C.L. Brown and Denton Bros. lumber, grain and ties. S.C. Hedges bought and sold livestock—as did Thos. Smith, H. Haines, Bud Crews and J.H. Turpin at a later date.

Two cousins, C.H. Howard and Mr.

Colley built a frame building on the site where the Hoops building now stands. This partnership in the mercantiles business became Howard and Howard when Tom Howard, a brother of C.H., bought Colley's interest in the business. C.H. Howard sold his interest to J.L. Hoops in 1892 and the Howard and Hoops combination lasted until Howard sold out to Hoops and moved to Marshfield in 1901.

J.L. Hoops was a well known Crocker merchant until his death in 1944. By nature charitable, progressive and energetic, his personality was outstanding as was, also, his influence in the community. Any good cause had his whole hearted support; any worthy need, his concern and help. He was instrumental in organizing the Bank of Crocker. For many years he owned a grain elevator near the Frisco depot.

Between the years of 1889-94, Jerry W. Tallman was manufacturing school desks, furniture and coffins. In the 1900's Jesse Rayl Jr. opened a drug store about where the present day Lacey Drug store is located.

W.D. Rowden came to Crocker in 1891. He owned a general store and a home for many years on the lot just north of the Dr. Tice building. Mrs. Rowden, at the turn of the century was known as "a friend indeed." Always ready to nurse and comfort the sick and "lay out" the dead. A kindly person, sympathetic and serene. A Rowden daughter, Stella and her husband (Dr. and Mrs. Wooten) were talented musicians, who passed their musical knowledge on to several generations of Crocker youths.

The 1890's are often referred to as the gay 90's and Crocker, in its small way, lived up to that designation. The Teeple saloon contributed its share to the gay life.

The building housing the Teeple Saloon was owned by W.F. Burks. Mrs. Burks found long stair climbing not in keeping with her avoidupois. Her problem came to be getting beer daily without going after it, but she solved the problem. She had her son cut a hole in the floor of her apartment above the saloon. Through this hole, she let down a half gallon bucket fastened to a rope to draw up her daily supply of beer.

The saloon keeper, Sterling Teeple, (until the fateful day of July 5, 1898) was a man of striking appearance and personality. He was more than 6 ft. tall, weighed 250 pounds, and had the strength to lift bodily any undesirable customer from his establishment. He had flashing white teeth in contrast to almost black hair and matching handlebar mustache. He was greatly admired by the townspeople for his looks, friendliness and ability to restore order out of disorder on his own. He stood for no "monkey-doodle" business. With one hand, he grasped the back of the neck of the trouble-

maker and with the other hand, he grasped the seat of his pants and out he went without touching the floor.

Sterling Teeple was not a drunkard but was in a business which breeds trouble and in his case, tragedy. The Fourth of July (1898) had passed without incident, except for a visit of two horsemen who came riding into town from the south. They had no money to pay for their drinks, or else, no desire to pay for them. As had happened on other similar occasions, they were picked up bodily and pitched into the street.

Minutes past dusk on the following calm, peaceful evening, a young boy, in the manner of a town crier, ran down the two blocks of main street—breaking the news that Sterling Teeple had been shot. It was his custom to sit on the front porch of his saloon, facing the railroad track, and watch boys playing marbles between his building and the depot each evening. This evening, minutes after he had lit his famous cigar, he was shot from the rear—the bullet went through his head and was found in the yard of the section foreman. Dr. Tice of Waynesville was in town. He and Wm. H. Murphy, (Crocker lawyer) gave their services with little to be accomplished by either.

W.D. Rowden and another man seated in front of W.D.'s building across the street from the rear of the saloon, saw two men running down the street north of his store building in the direction of the bridge (near the present Thomas and Fortner homes). Investigation proved that horses had been hitched to saplings in a thicket across and nearby the bridge. In this thicket, all clues ended and the plot thickened. Rumors became so rampant and wild that one law abiding citizen became distracted; thinking that some innocent person, maybe even himself, might be implicated and falsely convicted. He made a trip to the Stokes settlement to make known his anxiety. Men of his acquaintance convinced him that he had nothing to worry about and quieted his imagination. Someone reported that a man rode out of town on a squeaking saddle—the squeaking part indicating that it was a new saddle. So, men with new saddles were looked upon with suspicion. Every man, who was an enemy of Teeple was rounded up and questioned. Not one used the fifth amendment. One man telling about his interview, later stroked his beard and said, "I told them that I didn't do it, but that I was glad that someone did." One "far-out" story was that two men in white went out of town. Years later a dying man "was said" to have confessed that he fired the fatal shot—and thus: the story with all its twists and turns lives on—even after his son, Dick Teeple (late undertaker at Richland) and daughter Edith (Teeple) Porter have died.

One thing is known; the murdered man walked our streets—in his mouth a big cigar—and when he died, he clinched one there between those white, white teeth. This story, often told, reached the ears of a television audience boy one day, who quickly turned and asked, "What brand was it? That cigar, I mean."

Edith Teeple, fatherless at 5 years of age, was left the family 3 story home across the tracks—in plain view of the saloon which faced in its direction (now the St. Clair home). The man she married when she grew up drank so much she all but lost the home. Her stepfather relieved the financial pressure for her but in the end, the house was given up.

So, in the same manner as "dust to dust returnest" as waters that rise from the earth returns to it—So, the money derived from the saloon returned to it.

In the eighteen sixties and seventies, Jesse James (1847-1882) and Frank James (1843-1915) frequented the backwoods trails of this territory. They often visited their cousin, the wife of Black Jim Wall, who owned and operated a trading post, mill and post office called Faith. He owned farm land; bought, fed and sold livestock. At a long dining table in his home were fed not only 7 sons ("Frank, Peach, Cat, Floyd, Will, Chester and Jesse") and five daughters (Betty, Ida, Ollie, Cora and Stella) but anyone present at meal time was expected to eat.

According to a description of this post in early days there was great activity about the place—people coming and going—buying, selling and trading. Besides the yells in driving animals about, there was the serenade of the animals themselves; sheep bleating, cows bawling, hogs grunting, horses nickering, ducks quacking, roosters crowing, dogs barking and occasionally the gobbler coming through with an outstanding gobble. Most of these noises diminished at sundown. As night came on, sounds became mournful, lonesome and melancholy as the screech owls, whip-poor-wills, katy-dids, tree frogs and mocking birds together tried to out do the baying of the fox hounds.

Faith was nine miles from the Madden Church, (six miles northwest of Crocker). Mr. and Mrs. Wall brought their 12 children seated in the bed of a wagon to attend services in this church. Mrs. Wall advised her boys not to align with any fraternal organization—membership in Christ's organization was sufficient she insisted.

Mr. and Mrs. Brownie Miller lived on a farm, now owned by John Ichord, surrounding the Madden Church. They lived on the trail leading to the Walls home and were considered neighbors. On one occasion, after they had complied with a request for water to drink, they had a very friendly con-

versation with the mild mannered Frank James. Having met him previously in the Wall home, there was no mistaken identity concerning him, his beautiful horse or his brilliant diamond.

An individual, who had a moonlight ride with one of the James boys as Jim McMillian (the same Jim who during the Civil War cut the noose from his fathers neck). He was returning home on horseback from a courting date with Ollie Porter (Mitchell) when he heard hoof sounds approaching from behind. A man riding a horse of recognizable worth came up quickly by his side and for a while talked small talk in a very friendly manner. Then quite abruptly, he asked, "Are the James boys any where around?" Young Jim's reply was, "If I thought so, I'd be home." Then the horseman said, "You are riding with one right now." With that introduction over, it was as before until the cross-roads separated them and dark woods covered the two. Through the mind of one of them keeping time with his horses footbeats, two after thoughts were cutting deep—What a horse! What a man!

Mable (James) Elliott, wife of James W. Elliott and mother of John Elliott of Crocker was a second cousin of the James Boys. She had other children who were raised in Crocker—James, George, Joe, Ralph, Frances and Mary.

The following Associated Press news release was clipped from Friday's Springfield Daily News (1968).

WALTER JOHNSON'S MOTHER DIES AT 100

Olney, Md.—the mother of the late Walter (Big Train) Johnson, famed pitcher for the Washington Senators, is dead. Minnie O. Johnson died Sunday in a nursing home. She was 100.

Born in Wayne County, Ind., Mrs. Johnson lived on farms in the mid-west and the family was operating one in Kansas when Walter went to Washington.

One of her favorite stories was how as a child she had taken care of the guns of Jesse and Frank James when the notorious robbers were lodged overnight at her farm home at Dixon, Mo.

A number of early mills played important parts in the settlement and development of this area. Not far from Crocker were Wheelers Mill, Bartlett Spring Mill, Bray's Mill, and Schlicht Mill. Going to the mill was "an event" in the lives of the early settlers; looked forward to and enjoyed. While waiting to get their wagon loads of wheat and corn ground into a supply of bread stuff and feed, there was time to visit with farmers from miles around. Sometimes, the day was spent fishing in nearby waters; followed, perhaps by a fish fry.

One of the oldest water wheel mills of this area was Wheeler's Mill located about 9 miles southeast of Crocker at Wheeler's Spring near the Gasconade River. People brought their grain from as far away as Maries County and had to take their turn at the mill. Expressions grew out of this, such as: "Go to

mill and take your turn," "Shell 'a turn' of corn to take to the mill," and others. Turkeys, deer, squirrel and quail were plentiful and it was not uncommon for a customer to arrive at the mill with enough fresh meat to last for days. They were "put up" for the night—no charge—but out of appreciation, they gladly cut firewood.

William E. Wheeler (1825-1890 buried at Antioch), son of John (1791-1845) and Eliza B. (Wise) (1799-1848) Wheeler, was the first owner of the mill, which he built in 1873. He was married to Minerva Sherrill (1829-1877, buried at Antioch) in 1848. Their children were: John W. (the grandfather of Frances Carver Meiser of Crocker), Nathan, George W., Ray Ellen, Katy (Bray), Molly (Stokes), Fannie (Hutsell), and Cora (Layman). Mr. Wheeler was at Bray's Mill for a time before he came to Pulaski County in 1868—one hundred years ago.

After his wife died, he married Mary Lipscomb, the widow of Wade Lipscomb. His son, John Wymer, was connected with the milling business for many years. His wife, whom he married in 1875 was Harriet (Lipscomb) Wheeler. Their children were: Minerva (Carver), Ollie (Rayl), William, Luna, Clarence, Ethel (Miller), Lona, Elmer and Mary. Their son Willie, was enthusiastic about his father's mill, and liked working in it better than anything else. One day, when he was fourteen years old, he was oiling a part of it when his clothes got caught and he was beat to death.

Albert Bates was seriously injured when he was hit by a broken pulley—as

he waited for his grain to be ground.

A woman who lived near the mill dipped her baby in the icy cold waters of the mill race, in spite of the strenuous objections of the Wheelers. The child withstood the ordeal and lived.

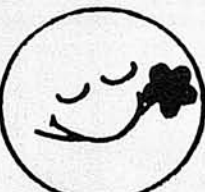
John Wymer Wheeler moved to Waynesville, where he held several county offices and owned a store—and where he lived until he died in 1938.

The Schlicht Mill, located six miles south of Crocker, is well supplied with water gushing from a hillside in sufficient quantities to make several artificial lakes and a stream. The first mill was known as Gasconade Mill.

John A. Schlicht purchased the mill and 200 acres of land in 1876. He lived in a large dwelling on a hill above the mill until his death on Feb. 13, 1918. He was born in Hasstetten, Bersirk, Upper Bavaria in 1846. He was well educated and could speak English, French and German. In 1866, he landed in Castle Garden, New York City without a pair of shoes. He found employment at Danbury, Connecticut at a milling business, a trade followed by seven generations of his ancestors. Later, he managed the J.F. Smith Mills in Lebanon for six years.

He added the full roller process to the Schlicht Mill. He used both steam and water power and could mill fine flour. The mill had a capacity of sixty barrels per day. Its whistle could be heard as far away as Crocker.

After the mill ceased to be used, Chas. Schlicht, son of John A. Schlicht, conducted a store and summer resort at the location.



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