

# EARLY PULASKI COUNTY HISTORICAL FACTS

by Gary Knehans

Researching history can be a most vexing enterprise. Not only can source material be non-existent or incomplete, but piecing the facts together correctly can prove very tricky indeed. Even so, every bit of information is as welcome as a refreshing shower in the heat of summer.

Several years ago, Oma Hensley Willets authored a book, titled *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*. It was a labor of love for the author, as she documented the histories of several early Pulaski County families and organized what essentially is a fascinating scrapbook with interesting photos and facts.

And what facts!

According to Willets, the first white child born in Pulaski County was a Harrison. The county's first doctor also carried that name. There were two different groups of Harrisons who were among early settlers here. The Harrisons from Pennsylvania came by way of Virginia and Kentucky sometime around 1843. One of the Harrisons was close kin to President William Henry Harrison, whose wife was originally a Hensley. Every Hensley family down that particular line, according to Willets' book, had the first or middle name of Harrison. For eighteen generations, all the James Harrisons named their sons James Harrison, but provided a different middle name to distinguish one from another.

The Pennsylvania-Virginia-Kentucky group of Harrisons settled near each other in a place called Harrison Bend.

Another group of Harrisons came to Pulaski County about 1820 from Scott County, Illinois. This would be the group that produced the county's first doctor and its first white child.

All of the Harrison families that settled in Pulaski County originated from a common English ancestor.

age. At one time, it was claimed he was the oldest citizen residing in the southwest part of the state. His brother B. B. also enjoyed distinctive longevity.

In 1825, a second wave of settlers included James Mayfield, James W. Harrison, and F. W. Percy. James Harrison in 1832 bought the first store at Little Piney. He became the first postmaster there and his son, James P., became the first mail contractor west of the Meramec Iron Works.

Another Harrison, Benjamin B., and his wife on October 1st, 1849, deeded 41 acres of land for a county seat. This was probably in Laclede County, as a B. B. Harrison and Thomas Craig are credited with laying out the first addition to the community of Lebanon.

The Harrisons, Hensleys, Heltons, Hendricks, Rollins, and Nickels were among the first settlers in Pulaski County. And, according to information in *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, members of these family groups "apparently knew each other before they came to the U. S." Inter-marriages between these families probably started even before immigration into this country.



Waynesville



Postcard from Hazelgreen showing Tillman Carroll's birthday party circa 1914. (Courtesy of Willis Carroll)

In 1817, a James Harrison settled near the mouth of the Big Piney. It is believed James Harrison, his brother-in-law, John Duncan, and W. E. Hawkins were the first white men to make a permanent settlement in the upper valley of the Gasconade. Harrison had three sons, Dr. James P. Harrison, B. B. Harrison, and Thomas C. Harrison. Dr. Harrison lived to a ripe old

age. Goodspeed's historical account of Pulaski County claims this area's earliest white settler was Josiah Turpin in 1813. He was the grandfather of a Joseph Turpin.

In 1816, three men named Johnson, Dulle, and Cullen arrived here from Mississippi. They settled in a valley on the Gasconade River five miles from Waynesville near a well-known saltpeter cave. The

men engaged in the manufacturing of gunpowder and sold it to trappers and hunters who frequented the area. Around 1817, Cullen disappeared while making a delivery of gunpowder. He was never seen again. Johnson and Dulle then moved to Bartlett's Spring and built a mill there.

Seven friendly Indians took possession of the saltpeter cave, but were attacked by a band of a hundred Osage Indians. From a lofty height, the small group of Indians successfully defended themselves until nightfall when they were able to slip out a passageway unknown to their attackers.

The battle proved to be a disaster for the Osage Indians. Their losses were so severe that it is said they left a pile of dead bodies behind. Nearly 60 years later in 1875, the bleached bones still were visible to those who wandered upon them.

In 1817, a Mr. Turpin from Kentucky; Jesse Ballew, Henry Anderson, and William Gillaspie of North Carolina; and their families settled on the Gasconade River 12 miles southwest of Waynesville.

Goodspeed's book says Mrs. Anderson one evening returned from milking to find

Richland, the Waymans--John, Thomas, Pleasant--and their families had settled. Living on the Big Piney were the Dears--Amon, Felix, and Lovel--and families.

All these early settlers lived in valleys along the rivers. Before 1840 and perhaps later, no one lived on any ridge or any place other than in a valley in the county.

Goodspeed names G. W. Gibson as the first "squatter" on the site of present day Waynesville. This was in 1831 or 1832. James A. Bates opened the first store on the Waynesville site in 1835. It was of log cabin design.

I was caught at it in

HOOKER, MO.



Postcard from Hooker, Mo.

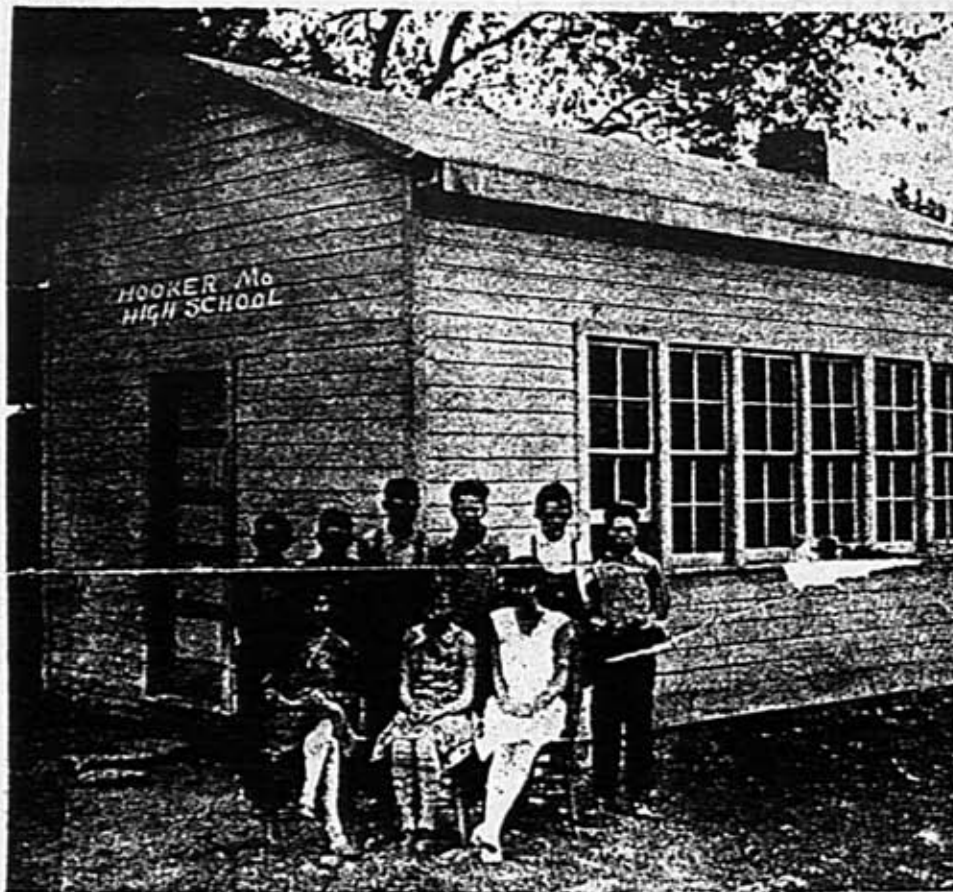
Contemporary with Pulaski County's earliest settlers were a number of friendly Indians. Goodspeed reports that some of the early white settlement areas contained old Indian mounds reminiscent of those constructed by the mysterious Mound Builders. Other artifacts also reported were rock pictures and crockery, including a rock pipebowl. When questioned by the settlers, the county's resident Indians had no knowledge of the origins of the artifacts, stating only that they had "always been there."



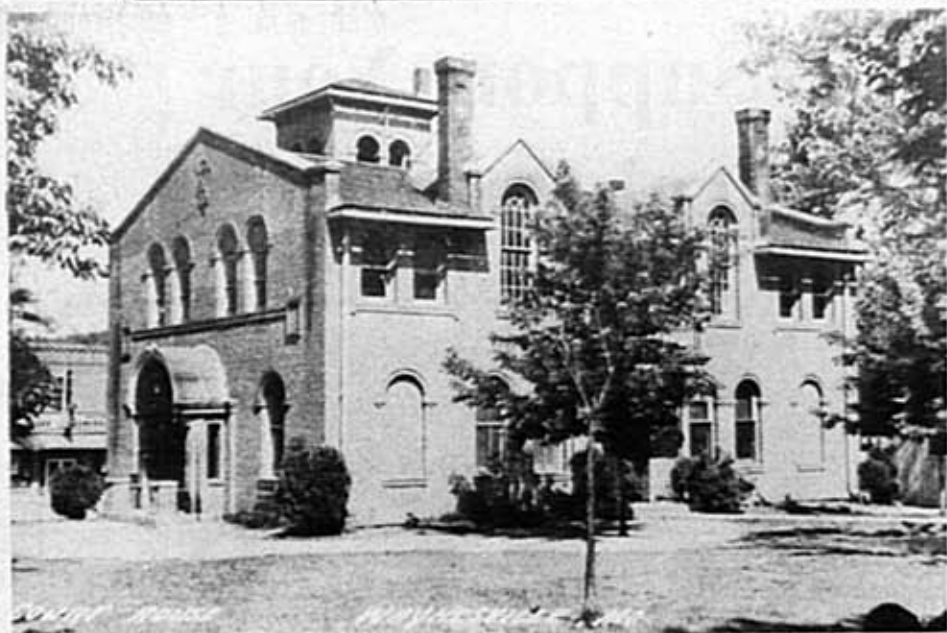
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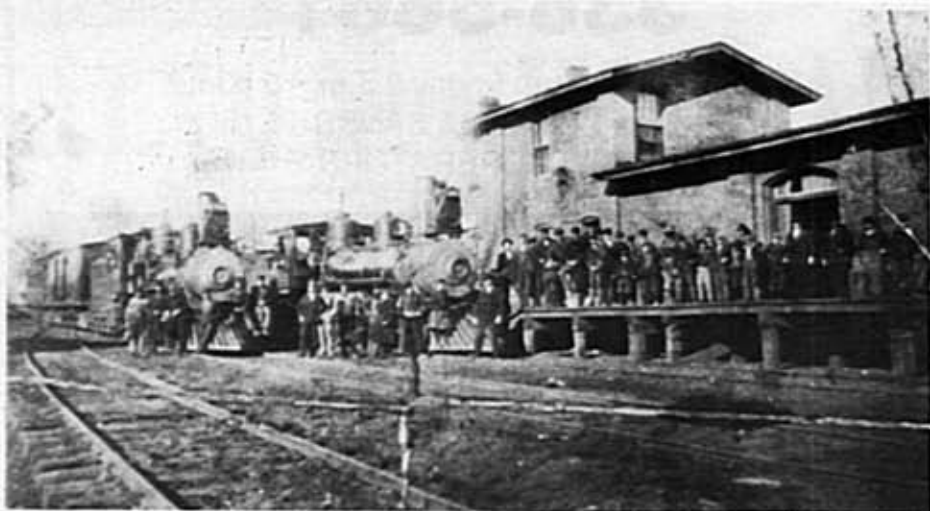




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Salem Frisco Station in the late 1800's



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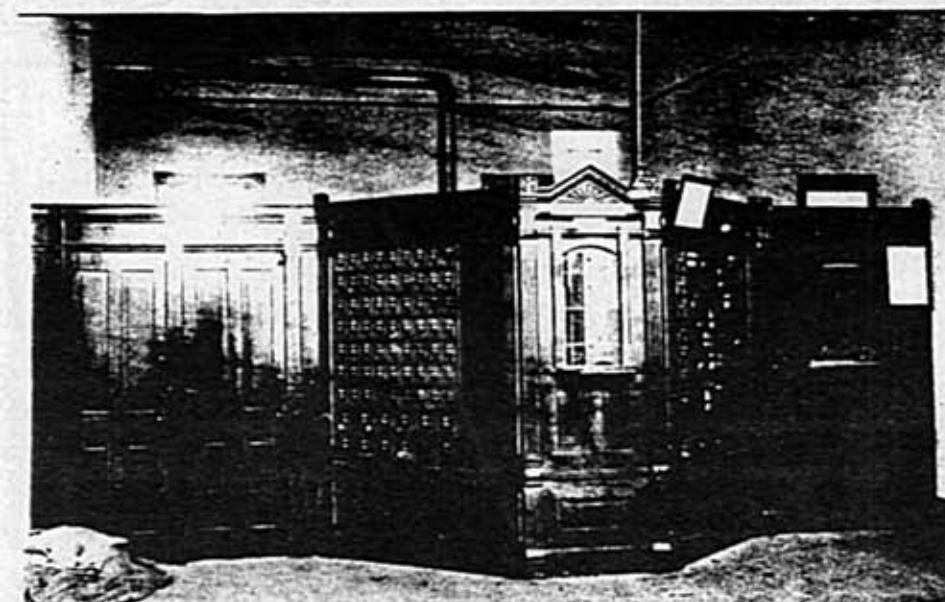
Old time Dixon.



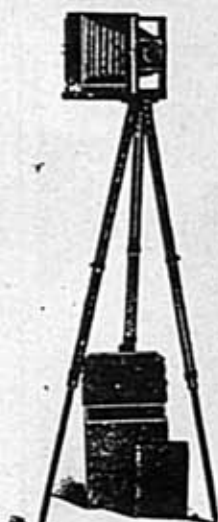
Dixon postcard dated in the early 1900's. (Photo courtesy of Donna Elkins)



Remains of the devastating 1913 Dixon Fire.



Dixon post office in 1920. Dr. Von Grep was the post master.



Dixon State Bank Note the old safe in the window.



Another view of the 1913 Dixon Fire.