

Hooker

By Leonard S. Fetterhoff

What do Pine Bluff, Wagon Ford, Piney Ford, and Hooker have in common? Answer: they all are names of the same community about 12 miles east of Waynesville, located on the old US 66 and Z, near where the Big Piney meets the Gasconade.

Early maps show the community as Pine Bluff. There was a Post Office at Pine Bluff from 1830 to 1880, except for about 8 years. The following list of dates and postmasters is from *History of Pulaski County Missouri, Vol. 2*:

1830, March 30 John B. Harrison
1849 Charles T. Oakes
1860, June 22 Thomas J. Benton
1866, May 3 Samuel A. Davidson
1867 Discontinued
1868 Restored William C. McClure
1872, February 23 Discontinued
1879, January 16 Restored Frank Hawkins
1880, February 12 Discontinued

Around the turn of the century it was called Wagon Ford, or sometimes Piney Ford. As late as 1905 some of the obituaries referred to the Wagon Ford Cemetery or the Piney Ford Cemetery, apparently referring to what is now known as the Hooker Community Cemetery.

When the Hooker Post Office was established in 1900, it was named for J.L. Hooker who had a store there and owned much of the land. Although the Post Office was named for Mr. Hooker, he was not the first postmaster. The Post Office operated there until 1955, moving to different locations in Hooker.

1900, June 28 Lewis W. Fisher
1900, August 27 James A. Miller
1901, April 23 William J. Copeland
1909, October 29 Margaret Hardester
1914, June 2 Victor V. Long
1915, August 26 Harry B. Gray
1916, August 26 Simeon Creasy

1917, October 12 Henry J. Hooker
1919, June 18 Simeon Creasy
1924, December 18 Floyd E. Prewett
1927, March 2 W.E. Graham
1927, October 14 Claude M. Gray
1933, June 3 Leo Robbins
1933, November 17

Jefferson L. Robbins
1934, December 4 James G. Ray
1937, April 17 L.J. Brumley
1938, Ivy Fancher
1942, November 10 Elmer Barton
1943, May 7 Bertie E. Barron
1955, June 24 Discontinued to Arlington

There was a Post Office at Rigsby, John C. Rigsby postmaster, from September, 1911 to December, 1912 when it was discontinued to Hooker.

There were several roads through the area, including the Kickapoo Trace, the "Trail of Tears", the "Wire" Road, Highway 14, and US 66

("Bloody 66"). The Wire Road ran from St. Louis to Springfield. Later, US 66 was built following about the same route. US 66 was a narrow, winding, blacktop road. In the 1940's parts of it were replaced with a divided highway and many of the curves were eliminated. The divided highway is now county road Z, although parts of the older 66 are still used in the area. The sections still used are narrow dirt or gravel stretches, with some blacktop still showing. One stretch of US 66 went past the cemetery, past where the saw mill is now located, and around the hill to the bridge across the Big Piney at Devil's Elbow. That curve was eliminated in the early 1940's when the Hooker Cut was built.

In the early part of this century, Hooker was a thriving community. There were several stores, a blacksmith, a doctor, and a mill. At one

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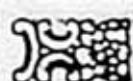
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time there was also a canning factory in the community. Before WWII there were a number of places where tourists could buy baskets, chairs, quilts, and various other items. Occasionally someone would send neighborhood correspondence to the Pulaski County Democrat or the Dixon Echo. Much of the news concerned visits to and from Hooker. For example, from the issue of the Democrat for 6 February 1903:

Dr. A.P. Harrison, of Dixon, Mo., visited the family of Mr. J.L. Hooker last Tuesday and Wednesday. Mrs. W.A. Ousley and daughter, Miss Nan, visited friends in Newburg this week.

Some of it reported events in the area:

Hooker is growing very rapidly we have a store a black-smith shop and several dwelling houses in our little town. Hurrah for Hooker. Dr. Casey who recently moved with his family to Hooker is kept quite busy, there is a good deal of sickness reported.

In May 1903 it was reported that a new business was moving to Hooker:

W.H. Ousley is moving his saw and grist mill to Hooker, Mo., and will move his family there soon. Mr. Ousley is a good mill man and will be a great convenience to that community.

How large was Hooker in 1903? The news from August 1903 answered that question:

Hooker is a City whose limits extend to Waynesville on the west, Dixon on the North, Arlington on the east and Texas Co. on the south, and contains several thousands acres of land, a store, post office, black smith shop, a saw and grist mill and also several fishing resorts.

There seemed to be some conflict in Hooker. The following incident in Waynesville was reported in the Democrat in September 1903:

Cut With a Knife: A.J. Rumans and M.B. Slaughter, two old men and citizens of the Hooker neighborhood, became involved in an altercation on our streets Tuesday and Slaughter cut Rumans in the left side with a knife inflicting a severe, but not thought to be dangerous, wound. We know nothing of the difficulty but such things should be stopped. Fighting is against both the state and municipal laws, which should be enforced.

The September news informed us that the road work was over in the district, the new saw and grist mill was doing a thriving business, and many people were in Waynesville "courting" (Circuit Court was in session).



HOOKER SCHOOL building constructed in 1934-35.

In January 1904 it was announced that telephone service was expanding in the county. The Dixon correspondent reported that:

A telephone line is being put in to connect Franks, Fishdam and Hooker with this place. Dixon will be connected with most every town and "crossroads store" in Maries, Miller and Pulaski counties.

In the same issue the Hooker correspondent reported that:

There is strong talk of a telephone at this place, to connect with the Arlington line. We hope it will be put in as it would be quite a convenience to this neighborhood.

There seemed to be a lot of interest in the new telephone service. In late February the Democrat announced that Dr. Harrison and others are building a telephone line from Dixon to Hooker.

The line was completed last week to Judge L.L. Cobb's place and is being continued this week. They say that if the people on Piney, the Wire Road and Waynesville will help, that the line will be brought to this place, thus connecting Waynesville with Dixon, Hooker and all the country between these points, which would be a great convenience. Farmers and

others along the line may have instruments put in at their homes or places of business at a reasonable cost. We hope to see the people become interested in this enterprise and encourage it.

Then in April, 1904, the Dixon correspondent reported that the telephone line had been extended to Hooker. There was a list of where the telephones were installed: Thos. Howards, L.L. Cobbs, J.B. Harveys, Fish Dam, J.H. Cains, B.H. Prewetts, and Hooker.

In October, 1905, the school board let a contract to Lick & Ellis of Dixon for a new school house. The new school house was built in what is now Mr. Potter's yard. The building was later moved to its present location, near the cemetery fence and was used as a church and community center. The building is still in use, maintained by the Hooker Cemetery Association. The move was accomplished by using large logs as rollers and pulling it with a stump puller.

Apparently New Year's Day was not a school holiday. The Democrat for Friday, January 5, 1906, reported that:

Professor George Johnson resumed

school after a week's vacation Monday, beginning the New Year in the new school house.

A two room school house was built in 1934-1935 and used until the school was consolidated with Waynesville. The two room school house was built on the same foundation as Mr. Potter's house.

Hooker was also the site of "Missouri's Smallest High School" (St. Louis Post Dispatch, October 27, 1929). The building was built by Harvey Sheldon and rented to the school district. It was a small building, measuring 16 feet by 12 feet, and was used for the 9th and 10th grades. The school was across Highway 14 ("Bloody 66") from the cemetery and was called the Job (pronounced Jobe) School.

The Pulaski County Museum and Historical Society is trying to find back issues of the Pulaski County Democrat. In particular, 1915, October 1917-October 1940, and any before 1902. Most of the other issues are available on microfilm but these issues are lost. Your help would be appreciated.