

- Cave John Wilson -

By Peggy Smith Hake

I would imagine any native of Miller County has heard the legendary story of Wilson Cave and the man for whom it was named--John Wilson. John was a native of Virginia (some reports give Ireland as his place of birth), born in 1755. Anxious to hunt in the virgin forests of the unknown western lands, he ventured into the Gasconade River country of central Missouri before 1810 (some accounts give the year 1810), and not too long afterward, he was in the Big Richwoods of southern Miller County. He seemed to like the area and before the winter's first snowfall, he was situated in a cave near the Brushy/Barren Fork of the Big Tavern Creek. Here he lived among the friendly Osage Indians, who were good neighbors to John, his wife Nellie (Ray) Wilson, and their three small sons--Alexander,

John, and William. That first winter they were comfortable in their primitive cave home and received help from the Osage tribes. The Indians brought them maize, beans, pumpkins, and apples, which had been harvested from their plentiful orchards.

John Wilson and his family lived in the cave for two years and he finally built a log cabin as a permanent home for his wife and sons. He lived to be almost 100 years old and gave instructions to his friends that his eventual death was not to be a time of mourning, but was to be celebrated, and everyone was to meet, sing, dance, and have a jolly good time! He left instructions that his grave would be inside his old cave home and his corpse was to be placed in a wooden coffin that he had made about 1842. He knew something of preservation, because he also instructed them

to pack his body in salt. He wanted them to place seven demi johns of peach brandy beside his coffin and then the opening to the cave was to be sealed and walled up. At the end of seven years, he wanted his tomb opened, the demi johns removed and everyone was to feast and toast his memory--just have a whooping good time.

When he died at the residence of his neighbor, John Brumley, in 1855, he was buried in the fashion he requested. But by the end of the seven years, the Civil War was in full swing and John Wilson was forgotten. His friends had scattered and the tomb left unnoticed. Later, the tomb was opened by vandals and the peach brandy was stolen. Whoever broke into John's burial site may have celebrated alright, but not in the fashion he had preferred!

Daniel Cummings and Silas Capps were named executors of the estate of John Wilson after his death. In the May 1859 term of the Miller County Court, 320 acres of his land was ordered to be sold on the steps of the courthouse. Notice had been given of the proposed sale of his land holdings by the usual manner of posting hand bills in ten public

places in the county, and notices were run for four weeks in a Jefferson City newspaper, The Jefferson Examiner. On a Monday morning, the first day of August 1859, part of his land, 160 acres, was sold to William C. Brumley, an old friend and neighbor. In November 1859, an additional 160 acres were sold to Sayles and Sarah Brown.

John Wilson, a great pioneer of Miller County's early frontier and an exciting folk hero, left this world in a rousing fashion. His cave is still there, overlooking the valley of the Barren Fork Creek as it winds northward to converge with the waters of the Big Tavern. His legend has remained with us to this day, and will continue to be passed on as each new generation is born. The story of John Wilson, his cave, his life, and his unique burial has been recorded in many books, including Goodspeed's History of Cole, Moniteau, Morgan, Benton, Miller, Maries, and Osage Counties; Schultz's History of Miller County; Jenkin's History of Miller County; They Left a Legacy, Historical Stories of Miller County, Missouri; Missouri, the Cave State; and Caves of Missouri.

The Old "Trade Right" Store

By Peggy Smith Hake

In 1927, Fred Hannah operated a country store in northeast Richwoods township in Miller County, and called it "Trade Right". It was located a short distance from Mount Gilead Church, and Berry School was not too far away. I was fortunate to read some of the old ledgers from his country store in the past; and most of the farming community around the store, including citizens from both Miller and Maries Counties, traded at his store.

Most of the staple goods were available--sugar, salt, coffee, flour, dress materials, thread, shoes, nails, coal oil, stove pipe, stove black and polish, et cetera. Later, Trade Right offered gasoline and oil for the cars that passed by the old country store.

Frederick "Fred" Hannah was the oldest son of Benjamin and Elizabeth (Simpson) Hannah, natives of Pennsylvania. Benjamin was born circa 1830 and Elizabeth was born in 1841. They married in Miller County on June 7, 1870. According to marriage records, her name was Hannah Elizabeth Simpson, so it is understandable why she was called *Elizabeth Hannah*, not *Hannah Hannah*!!

Fred was born in March 1872 and had two younger brothers--John Franklin, born in 1874, and James Albert, born in 1877. There may have been other children, but I have not located any records of others.

Fred Hannah married Alcena Jones in October 1896. She was a daughter of James W. Jones and Frances Bowlin, who lived in the same community as the Hannah family. In 1927, when Fred was operating the Trade Right store, he was 55 years old. He died in January 1966, almost reaching his 94th birthday, and was buried beside Alcena at Bray's Union Cemetery. She had died 14 years earlier in 1952.

I've recently heard from Zella Helton Humphrey and George Yoakum, both of Iberia, who told me more information about the old store and community. They said there was also a barber shop run by Edward Sooter and a blacksmith shop run by Nate "Cotton Head" Lawson. There also was a mill operated by W. S. "Bill" Lee, who ground wheat and corn there for flour and meal. Bill Lee also had a cream house, where he bought cream from the farmers and tested it. Someone from the Dixon area bought the cream.

Trade Right was a busy and bustling place in those years. It was a favorite meeting place for all the young and old on Saturdays.

Down the road a short way was another store, Needmore, which was run by Chris and Ethel Helton. In the store was a big wooden ice box full of ice, which was where the soda pop was kept.

Mr. Helton also ran a blacksmith shop.


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