

# The SOCIETY of OZARKIAN HILLCROFTERS

Identifying and Preserving What Makes the Ozarks Exceptional

Volume 1 Issue 2 Summer 2021

## Message from Hillcrofters President

Hillcrofters, I must say that summertime in the Ozarks may very well be my favorite season. The Ozarks region is blessed to experience all four seasons, and each one of those seasons has something truly special to offer. But for me, summertime is a treat for all of the senses.

The sounds of summer in the Ozarks is the first thing that comes to my mind. The promise of warmer weather coming with the chirp of the spring peeper frogs of the evening, early on—when the nights are still cool and the leaves are still lime green. And it's always a thrill to hear the whippoorwill's first lonely and repetitive call of the season as the sun sets much later in the day. I even enjoy the intense buzzing of the cicadas in the trees that seem to intensify the humid heat of late summer.

The aromas of an Ozarks summer always stir pleasant memories too: The sweet smell of fresh cut hay. The pungent smell of tomato plants when you pick those beautiful red globes from the garden. The tastes of summer include those same red tomatoes, especially when served in slices on thick bacon sandwiches. And how can anyone forget biting into a sweet, juicy fresh peach, or a slice of gooseberry or blackberry pie.

But I think my favorite sensation during summer in the Ozarks is to get good and hot on a rocky creek bank with fishing pole in hand, or to paddle down the river in my old canoe with my family . . . just soaking in the summer sun until I'm just about to bake . . . and then to jump into that cool, clear, spring-fed stream and feel the life and energy jolt back into me, being refreshed in the truest sense of the word. Hillcrofters, I encourage you to take time to get outdoors and enjoy summer in the Ozarks. I know it can be hot, and it's famous for its humidity. But there are so many wonderful things about the

President's Message continued on next page)

### OUR GOAL

To identify attributes that make the Ozarks region exceptional, raise awareness of these attributes, and document the attributes to benefit future generations.

### OUR AREAS OF INTEREST

Ozarks Nature/Conservation  
Ozarks History/Historic Sites  
Ozarks Folklore/Folkways  
Contemporary Ozarks Culture  
Notable Ozarks Personalities

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“natural” Ozarks, many of them uniquely Ozarkian: Things that create wonderful memories and experiences. When we experience these things, and appreciate them, we are “refreshed” as to why it’s so important that we preserve what we can of the Ozarks for future generations.

This issue of The Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters newsletter is chock-full of information and great articles about the Ozarks we love. We have a report on partnership efforts with the Missouri State Parks on the preservation of the Garber Schoolhouse. We also have a whole bunch of information on all of the happenings at the Shepherd’s Old Ozarks Settlers Days, held back in May at the Shepherd of the Hills Farm. We have a wide variety of articles from our generous and talented authors, Marilyn Perlberg, Hayden Head, Bob Kipfer, and Gwen Simmons. We will learn about the history of Murder Rocks with fresh new insights and information that weeds through decades of lore and mythology. We will learn about the Edwards Mill at College of the Ozarks, and how this functioning mill benefits the college and the students while perpetuating Ozarks culture. We will learn about a Carolina wren family from a photo essay by Master Naturalist Bob Kipfer. And we will learn about a long-forgotten Ozarks novel that was similar in romanticized content and published the same year as the novel that eclipsed it in our new book review section, The Book Bag.

As always . . .

I appreciate very much your continued interest in The Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters. We will work hard to address our goals and projects through leadership and your volunteerism. We will also do our best to ensure that you, as members, find your participation to be an enriching, positive, and productive outlet for your interest in the Ozarks. We expect to provide you with ongoing opportunities to learn more about the Ozarks and people who have a similar passion for this wonderful region. It is my great pleasure to welcome the members who have recently joined us.

Most sincerely,

Curtis Copeland

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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The newsletter is available on the website and distributed to members by email. Newsletters in hard copy are sent by traditional mail to contributing authors and requesting members.

## Upcoming Event

### Hillcrofters Summer Meeting

Thursday, August 19, 2021, 6:00 p.m.– 8:30 p.m. CDT  
 Bonniebrook Gallery and Museum  
 485 Rose O’Neill Rd., Walnut Shade, Missouri

The Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters will be holding its Summer 2021 meeting at the Bonniebrook Gallery and Museum at 6:00 p.m. on August 19. In addition to discussing the activities of our society, there will be a presentation by Jack Ray, assistant research professor and assistant director of the Missouri State University Center for Archaeology Research. Jack Ray will discuss a dugout canoe found in Arkansas that dates back to the 1780s, and how this rare item relates to Native Americans and early French fur traders and explorers in the Ozarks region.

## New Board Member

### Thomas Motley

The Hillcrofters board of directors elected attorney and Judge Thomas (Tom) Motley to the board in May. Motley brings important legal knowledge and experience to the Hillcrofters, an important skill set as we grow as an organization and venture into more complex preservation projects.

Motley was born at Skaggs Community Hospital (now Cox Branson) and was raised in Branson, Missouri. He graduated from College of the Ozarks in 1989. He attended the University of Missouri–Columbia School of Law and graduated in 1991. He began practicing law with his father, Marvin Motley, in Branson in 1991.

Motley was appointed a Branson municipal judge in 2001 and has served continuously in that capacity since then. He was elected to the Kirbyville school board in 2009 and served for several years as its president. He was elected to the Missouri Municipal and Associate Circuit Judges Association, serving as its secretary from 2012 to 2013, vice president and state conference planning chair in 2014, and president in 2015.

(Thomas Motley continued on next page)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit our website at:  
[societyofozarkianhillcrofters.com](http://societyofozarkianhillcrofters.com)

Find our group page on Facebook

## CONTACT US

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## MEMBERSHIP

Individual Membership  
 - \$20 per year

Student Membership  
 - \$10 per year

Membership application forms can be found on our website:

[societyofozarkianhillcrofters.com/membership](http://societyofozarkianhillcrofters.com/membership)

You may order your membership online through the website, or send a check or money order to:

PO Box 682  
 Ozark, Missouri 65721

Motley presently is the association's director at large. Several years ago, Motley was appointed to the board of the Historic Downtown Branson Community Improvement District and presently is chair of that organization.

He still maintains his private practice and service as a Branson municipal judge. He enjoys the practice of law and knowing that he is able to help people solve their problems. "I was blessed," Motley says, "to have parents who felt the need to make sure that I was aware of where I was—meaning they wanted me to be knowledgeable of the area and the people of the area and to understand exactly what made this area so special to not only my parents but to those people who also called it home. I was fortunate to grow up in a place that provided an idyllic childhood—I have a strong desire to give others those same feelings I learned and experienced."

Motley will celebrate 26 years of marriage to his wife, Dawn, in September. They have two sons. Jacob presently is a junior at Drury College, and Charlie is a senior at Branson High School.

## News and Projects

### Shepherd's Old Ozarks Settlers Days

The Shepherd of the Hills farm and theater, a landmark tourist destination in the region for 60 years, and an entity of Ozarks cultural preservation in its own right, teamed up with the Hillcrofters for a Spring music and crafts festival. The festival, Shepherd's Old Ozarks Settlers Days, was held on Saturday and Sunday, May 15 and 16, at the Shepherd of the Hills grounds. A portion of the ticket sales was collected to benefit the Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters and its Ozarks preservation projects.

The festival featured more than 30 craft vendors, food and beverage trucks, traditional craft demonstrators, six traditional and bluegrass music acts, and an Ozarks history lecture series on the grounds at the historic Morgan Church. The lecture series featured six speakers. The Hillcrofters agreed to select the music acts, history lecturers, and traditional craft demonstrators.

The featured music acts represented well the traditional and bluegrass music of the Ozarks region. The music lineup started on Saturday morning with the Ozark Mountain Roots, a group of young musicians. These talented musicians represented the Ozark Mountain Music Association (OMMA). The OMMA is dedicated to teaching traditional Ozarks music to students from elementary through high school. The Hillcrofters have provided scholarship funds to OMMA's summer music camp.

Luke Acker from Ozark, Missouri, was next in the Saturday music lineup. Luke Acker is a singer and songwriter who has played and performed throughout southwest Missouri since 2005. He is well known for his ability to cover songs from all genres and decades of music.

The duo of Banjo Joe and Randy Hill, who refer to themselves as The Woodchucks, played on Saturday afternoon. Several of their longtime fans in the audience knew them a decade ago in a trio called the

(Old Settlers continued on next page)

Whistle Pigs. Joe and Randy gained new fans on Saturday, as Randy Hill's hard-driving doghouse bass and Banjo Joe's quick and nimble picking drew a crowd.



Sunday's musical lineup started with Magnolia Wind, a female duo from southwest Missouri. Magnolia Wind creates a unique Ozarkian sound by combining folk, bluegrass, gospel, and old-time music. Each member of the duo played a multitude of instruments, including fiddle, mandolin, guitar, bass, and banjo. Maddie and Emalee love to spread joy through the pure, familiar old-time music that originated in the Ozarks and Appalachian hills.

Next on Sunday was Abbey Waterworth, a native of Clever, Missouri, who has performed in Chicago and Nashville. Abbey Waterworth has three CDs to her credit. She has also shared the stage with the Ozark Mountain Daredevils.

The well-known husband-and-wife duo, The Creek Rocks, played the final musical set of the event. Cindy Woolf and Mark Bilyeu of the Creek Rocks are talented songwriters as well as instrumentalists. They are also scholars of traditional Ozarks folk music. They treated

the audience to renditions of both centuries-old folksongs and original tunes they crafted.

The Ozarks history lecture series was loaded with talent as well. The lectures on Saturday started with Bud Lynn, an iconic actor in the Shepherd of the Hills outdoor drama. Bud Lynn is a recognized knowledgeable historian. He gave historical tours at the Shepherd of the Hills and had a history segment on a local television station. He gave a presentation on the history of the Shepherd of the Hills.

The next lecturer on Saturday, Ken Henderson, has lived in Stone or Taney County for most of his 70 years. At age 13, he began working at Silver Dollar City during its first craft festival in 1963. He retired from the City in 2006, having served as a director for 30 years. Ken Henderson is the founder of the Reeds Spring Area Hall of Fame and the recipient of the 2020 Humanitarian Award from the Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters.

The lecture series continued on Sunday with Susan Scott, president of the Bonniebrook Historical Society board of directors and Rose O'Neill scholar. Susan Scott gave an excellent presentation on Rose O'Neill and her famous Ozarkian friends, who included Thomas Hart Benton, Vance Randolph, Mary Elizabeth Mahnkey, May Kennedy McCord, Harold Bell Wright, John Neihardt, and the Lynch sisters.

John Fullerton wrapped up the lecture series on Sunday afternoon. A seventh-generation Branson native, John Fullerton performed with the legendary Sons of the Pioneers. Today, he is a historical tour

(Old Settlers continued on next page)

guide at Shepherd of the Hills. He gave his presentation on the little town of Garber, a railroad town founded at the turn of the 20th century. Garber was a residence and sanctuary for many of the characters in the original *The Shepherd of the Hills* novel by Harold Bell Wright.

Festival attendees were provided the opportunity to view traditional craftsmanship in action, right there in the shadow of the famous and more than 100-year-old Old Matt's Cabin. Wagon experts Louis Allen and Danny Metzger brought an actual Springfield freight wagon and a jail wagon so that visitors could get an up-close-and-personal look at transportation in the 19th century Ozarks.

Springtime in the Ozarks is notorious for a variety of weather, and the festival on Saturday was treated to a real gully-washer of a rain. But that did not seem to hinder the attendance too much. Also considering this was a first-year festival, the attendance numbers were reasonably good. On Sunday, the weather improved greatly. The Shepherd's Old Ozarks Settlers Days provided an excellent opportunity to experience a wide variety of Ozarkiana, from music to crafts to actual historic sites on the grounds of the Shepherd of the Hills.

### Hillcrofters Clean Up Historic Garber Schoolhouse at New State Park

In December 2016, then Missouri Governor Jay Nixon announced three new state parks. One of these, currently referred to as Ozark Mountain State Park, is a 1,011-acre tract of land covered by hardwood forests and one of the largest natural glade areas owned by the state. The property also includes a two-mile segment of Roark Creek and a three-mile segment of East Fork Roark Creek. The new park also contains a few historic and cultural features, including the Garber one-room schoolhouse constructed in 1904.

The now-extinct community of Garber and the larger community of Roark Creek valley were significant to the Shepherd of the Hills country and the 1907 Harold Bell Wright novel that gave the "country" its name. The new state park is undeveloped and currently closed pending input from the public on its future use, as well as the creation of a conceptual development plan by Missouri State Parks.

We as Hillcrofters became very interested in the acquisition of the new park and its future development because of the park's potential for projects that would meet our goal to preserve Ozarks historical, cultural, and natural features. In 2019, the Hillcrofters entered into an official partnership agreement with Missouri State Parks for volunteer assistance and support of Ozark Mountain State Park.

A Hillcrofters priority project for the park property is the preservation of the Garber one-room schoolhouse. The schoolhouse represents an original and tangible piece of Ozarks rural culture from the early 20th century. The schoolhouse is historically unique for its association with the famous novel *The Shepherd of the Hills*. The novel's worldwide success had a major impact on the local culture, introduced many readers to the Ozarks region, and was the first major tourist draw to the area. Hillcrofters and Missouri State Parks share a goal of preserving the building and creating an educational site as well as a main point of interest for the future developed park.

Although the Garber schoolhouse still stands, the 117-year-old building has needed attention. The interior needed clearing of debris, old lumber, remnants of old stored hay and straw, and dens and

(Garber Schoolhouse continued on next page)

materials left by years of habitation by rodents and small animals. The windows, doors, and a few places in the roof needed repair to slow deterioration until a full restoration could be completed.

Missouri State Parks agreed to partner with The Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters for a Garber schoolhouse cleanup and workday on April 17, 2021. The State Parks would supply building materials, equipment, and additional Parks staff for the event. The Hillcrofters agreed to provide volunteers for manual labor.

The response to an announcement to our members was incredible. We committed to State Parks to have ten volunteers. Twenty-three Hillcrofters volunteers showed up, including Lt. Governor Mike Kehoe and his wife, Claudia, who recently joined our organization and surprised us that day.



With the assistance of Missouri State Parks staff, and the large turnout of Hillcrofters volunteers, we were able to clean up the inside of the schoolhouse and the schoolhouse grounds, repair the roof, and secure the windows and doors from the elements.

Lt. Governor Kehoe stated on social media that “Claudia and I proudly joined The Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters and Missouri State Parks to help repair the Old Garber School House. Great way to kick off National Park Week in Taney County.”

## Articles Section

### Murder Rocks: A Historic Site

by Marilyn Perlberg

South of Kirbyville in rural Taney County, Missouri, is the huge sandstone outcropping known as Murder Rocks. The formation is privately owned, but it is also a historic landmark of ongoing public interest. Legends of Murder Rocks originated during the Civil War, and they evoke scenes as dramatic as any described in a Wild West film or novel. Picture a well-traveled 19th-century trail, an infamous bushwhacker named Alf Bolin, and rocks big enough to hide an outlaw band.

#### Alf Bolin and Murder Rocks

The rock outcropping is located on Pine Hill, along present state Highway JJ. It is listed in *Geologic Wonders and Curiosities of Missouri*, partly for the link with history (Beveridge). As a geologic phenomenon, the rocks probably developed from an ancient sinkhole or cave fill. Weathering and erosion produced fractures, which then enlarged and formed fissures within pinnacles as high as 15 feet. The link with history is Alf Bolin, the Civil War bushwhacker who hid his ambush parties there, inside a cleft.

Bolin took advantage of location. The rock outcropping adjoined the major nineteenth-century trail between Harrison, Arkansas, and Springfield, Missouri. Begun in 1837 as a rough mail route, the trail became the Springfield-Harrison Road, a teeming thoroughfare by mid-century. It carried anyone with business north and south: freight wagons loaded with marketable goods; livestock including sheep, cattle, and hogs; stagecoach passengers; circuit riders; peddlers; and post riders with mail sacks slung onto their saddles.



Murder Rocks

Photo by Jerry D. Vineyard, courtesy of Missouri Department of Natural Resources

During the Civil War, Union and Confederate troops and their supply trains used the road. Furloughed soldiers traveled back and forth. Wagon trains carried families seeking safer places. The road also carried the disaffected elements, the horse and cattle thieves, guerrilla bands, marauders, bushwhackers. For these outlaw types, the Springfield-Harrison Road was a jumping-off point for forays into a countryside with no stake in the war.

The region that encompassed Taney County was too hilly and rocky to support crops that relied on slave labor. It was a no-man's-land, caught in the crossfire of opposing forces, of abolitionist supporters from Kansas and Confederate sympathizers from Arkansas. Local people lived in isolation on small farms. With their able-bodied men away at war, the women, children, and old men

(Murder Rocks continued on next page)



left behind were easy targets. Defenseless populations were subject to skirmishes, rampaging, pillaging, and sometimes murder.

Alf Bolin was a central figure. He terrorized the countryside from northern Arkansas far into southwest Missouri, returning often to the rock outcropping along the Springfield-Harrison Road. There, he plundered and wrecked freight wagons, stole livestock, took horses from their riders, robbed and injured travelers, and committed murder. No one knows how many Bolin murdered in all, at the rocks or elsewhere. He once bragged that he murdered 19, but his career was not yet over at the time.



Murder Rocks below state Highway JJ, courtesy of Russell Jackson

Douglas Mahnkey, longtime Taney County resident and author, located the names of several innocent people murdered by Bolin: 12-year-old Bill Willis, shot as he carried corn to feed his horse; James Johnson, uncle of a Christian County judge; Bob Edwards of Taney County; an 80-year-old man named Budd, who was delivering corn to help feed neighborhood women and children. Old settlers said that Bolin was “the meanest looking man they ever had seen” (Mahnkey, 36, 37).

Bolin displayed unusual cruelty, given that he likely was barely out of his teens when the war broke out. As a subject for study, he is as “hard to pin down today” as he ever was (Johns, “Bushwhacker Alf”). Accounts differ about his origins, motivation, even his name, which is also spelled Bolen, Bolden, or Boler. He was an orphan, it is claimed, but two families—the Clouds and the Bilyeus—share the story of fostering him (Johns, “Bushwhacker Alf”).

Whether Bolin sympathized with one side in the war is unknown. Some accounts suggest that Bolin had cause to despise the Union. He was known to have murdered at least two Union soldiers at Murder

(Murder Rocks continued on next page)

Rocks. Many Union families suffered from his raids and pillaging. The Union finally lost patience.



Forest vegetation at Murder Rocks, courtesy of  
Russell Jackson

Bolin met his end when the Union offered a reward for his capture. The capture took some time because Bolin and his band knew every hill, cave, and hiding place in the region. Union forces finally set a trap. They conspired with a Confederate soldier imprisoned in the Springfield stockade. If the trap worked, the soldier would be set free. The details of what followed vary according to author, but the basics are known. "The Story of Alf Bolin" is a source often followed (Mahnkey).

The captured Confederate soldier was Robert Foster. He and his wife had a farmhouse a few miles south of Murder Rocks, near the Arkansas border. Bolin had a camp nearby. He occasionally visited the farmhouse to have Mrs. Foster prepare him a meal. To save her husband, Mrs. Foster agreed to take in a Union soldier to lie in wait for Bolin.

The Union chose a 22-year-old Iowa recruit named Zachariah Thomas. Disguised as a sick, very weak Confederate soldier, Thomas made his way to the Foster house, staying upstairs. On February 2, 1863, Bolin stopped by. He heard a noise upstairs. Thomas then feigned a painful descent. Mrs. Foster explained that Thomas was ill and needed shelter before he could continue on his way south.

Mrs. Foster set a table next to the fireplace. Bolin, suspicious at first, eventually relaxed. The men had dinner. Bolin then bent toward the fireplace to light his pipe from a live coal. At once Thomas hit Bolin over the head with a plow coulter. A second blow finished the man off.

Union troops retrieved the body and headed north with Mrs. Foster and her belongings. People along the way rejoiced to be rid of the much-feared Bolin. At the town of Forsyth, a resident cut off Bolin's head. The body was buried, but the head was taken north to the town of Ozark as proof of death. At the courthouse in Ozark, joyous residents stuck the head on a pole and threw rocks at it. Thomas collected his reward. According to some accounts, he shared it with the Fosters.

Bolin was gone, but his legacy lived on. Tales about Bolin and his infamous deeds were told and retold, generating the conflicting accounts that exist today. For more than a century, people claimed they saw Bolin's ghost, his head floating in the air, his headless body walking through the region. In the popular imagination, Bolin and the rocks became inseparable. As a result, a guiltless geologic wonder bears a gruesome name. It is Murder Rocks.

(Murder Rocks continued on next page)



Murder Rocks below state Highway JJ, courtesy of Russell Jackson

### **The Jacksons and Murder Rocks**

The United States owned Pine Hill land that included Murder Rocks until 1899, when William H. Johnson purchased it. Johnson, a lawyer and developer of Hollister, saw opportunities in Taney County land sales (McCall, *English Village*, 17). Unpurchased government land was in demand. People were rushing to set up homesteads. Out-of-state investors were snapping up mineral lands, hoping to profit from local mining operations.

Abstracts of title show that Johnson quickly resold his Pine Hill Murder Rocks land to a series of buyers, including investors from Indiana. The abstracts also show that the investors did not stay. Mining operations soon proved fruitless, and resources in timber were gone. Hacked trees provided ties for the

(Murder Rocks continued on next page)

coming railroad, completed through Hollister by the end of 1905. In 1918, a lone owner, James T. Antweiler, sold his land to a Hollister merchant, Elmer Dean Jackson.

Elmer Dean was not the first Jackson in the Pine Hill area, but he was the first Jackson known to have owned Murder Rocks. Elmer Dean planned to raise livestock on Pine Hill. A section of the Springfield-Harrison Road ran through the land, but it was in disuse, replaced by the railroad. Elmer Dean, married in 1896 to Orpha Hall, had two sons when he moved to Pine Hill, William Wright born in 1901 and Dean Hall in 1910. When Elmer Dean died in 1921, William Wright Jackson worked the land.



Murder Rocks, courtesy of Russell Jackson

William's brother, Dean Hall Jackson, graduated from the School (now College) of the Ozarks and became an ordained minister. In the 1930s, Dean Hall taught school at Mincy and at Kirbyville. In 1936, he published a manuscript about Murder Rocks in the *White River Leader* (July 31, Aug. 7). His account is a compelling eyewitness appreciation of a scene so often described in terms of death and destruction. The account has the additional value of preserving a scene that vanished with later road realignment.

Dean Hall Jackson describes a view east of the rocks, looking west toward them. "Come stand with me on the western slope of Pine Hill above the old Springfield-Harrison Road," he writes, "and let's breathe in a bit of the beauty of the stretching timber-clad hills." The landscape reveals oak and hickory, an occasional paler green pine, and glades below covered with bluish green cedar. "But to me most inspiring," Dean Hall asserts, "are the huge formations of sandstone which lie just below the road."

The rocks rest on a steep grade, surrounded and hidden by tall trees, and pine and oak sprouts matted with grape vines. "Just above these rocks are the deep cuts which mark the course of the route of the old road." Dean Hall notes that the declivity below the rocks is so steep that their size can be gauged only from the top.

His tone changes. "I wish that we might stop here," Dean Hall writes, "and leave Murder Rocks in the beauty of their natural surroundings." But a "hideous spectacle" mars their history, and he must press on. He heard the "ugly tales" as a boy, all with "the same horror in their theme."

Dean Hall relates the tale told by his great-uncle, J. N. Stephens. In this tale, Bolin is not an orphan, nor was he raised by a Cloud or Bilyeu family. He is the son of a "southern sympathizer" named Bolden. When a "northern soldier" kills his father, Alf seeks vengeance against the Union. He hides at Murder Rocks, plundering and shooting anyone he considers his enemies, killing several there.

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In the Stephens tale, Bolin is captured not by one but by two men, Captains Forester and Richards. Unlike the brave Mrs. Foster of Mahnkey's account, the wife, Mrs. Richards, is insignificant. "Mrs. Richards knew nothing of the plot or of the killing." She simply tells Bolin that the men wish to chat with him. Bolin is killed with a "large bar of iron," not a plow coulter, while Mrs. Richards prepares the evening meal. She faints when she sees the bludgeoned Bolin.

Dean Hall relates his experiences with one of the many Murder Rocks legends, that Bolin hid his ill-gotten treasure nearby. Dean Hall admits that he once "played hooky" to join some schoolmates on a treasure hunt. He first saw "one of the old one-cylinder automobiles" when several men drove from Arkansas to find the treasure. The men "explored and dug all around Murder Rocks, and went away disappointed."



The legend of Bolin's hidden treasure persists to this day. The ghost stories persist as well. It is rumored that screams can still be heard coming from Murder Rocks.

Top of Murder Rocks, courtesy of Russell Jackson

### **Murder Rocks Today**

Has public interest in Murder Rocks declined since Dean Hall Jackson's time? Not according to Russell Jackson, the present owner. "It has been going on all along," he says. Russell is the grandson of Elmer Dean Jackson and the son of William Wright Jackson. Dean Hall Jackson was Russell's uncle. Russell was born on the Jackson land and still resides there.

"Many people come to my door asking about Murder Rocks," he says. Some people seek permission to view the site. Some people want him to take them there. Some people know the location and simply trespass. There is no drive into the site, Russell says, and it is dangerous to park along the road.

Accessing Murder Rocks today requires not only parking along the road but clambering down the steep embankment. No walking access exists. Nor can motorists view Murder Rocks as they drive by on the east side, the vantage point Dean Hall Jackson enjoyed. The site can be viewed only from below, looking toward the east, because the highway was realigned.

In 1962, the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) did a 24-foot graded earth and granular material project. Chip seal surfacing followed in 1969 and eventually hard paving. As a result, Highway JJ today is situated well above the old Springfield-Harrison Road. That road is buried beneath the few yards of embankment that slope down to the top of the rocks.

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Russell Jackson wants to have Murder Rocks developed as a historic site accessible to the public. He is willing to have a government or other entity take over the property for that purpose at no charge. He has prepared a survey and proposes a 6.9-acre plot that includes Murder Rocks, hiking trails, and public parking. Russell hopes to make the rocks safe for the many people interested in visiting them.

Did the Jacksons ever anticipate or encourage such interest from the public? According to Russell Jackson, the family knew that killings happened at Murder Rocks but never wanted to make an issue of them. Russell himself resides not far from the site. Has he thought about the ghosts still claimed to inhabit Murder Rocks? “No,” he says. “I’m not superstitious – but I wouldn’t want to camp out there overnight.”

### Acknowledgments

I am immeasurably indebted to Russell Jackson, who shared many in-person conversations and emails about his land. Russell also provided family papers, abstracts of title, and his survey for developing a historic site. Without Russell’s help, I would not have found the typed manuscript with microfiche of Dean Hall Jackson’s article “The Old Ox Trail” (*White River Leader*, July 31 and August 7, 1936).

I am deeply grateful for help given by Historic Preservation Manager Michael Meinkoth and Historic Preservation Specialist Tyler Holladay of the Missouri Department of Transportation. My special thanks go to Tyler Holladay for his research on the history and development of state Highway JJ.

Jerry L. Prewett and Hylan Beydler of the Missouri Geological Survey, Department of Natural Resources, kindly granted permission to publish the Jerry D. Vineyard photo of Murder Rocks.

### Works Cited / Selected Works Consulted

It would be hard to imagine finding a history of the area that does not summarize, or at least mention, the story of the infamous Alf Bolin and Murder Rocks. The following list contains only a few of the numerous published sources consulted for this article.

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## Edwards Mill: Back of the Flour

by Gwen Simmons

An old poem by Maltbie Davenport Babcock acknowledges the source of our daily bread:

Back of the loaf the snowy flour,  
back of the flour the mill.  
Back of the mill the wheat and the show'r,  
The sun and the Father's will. (Hymnary)

The Ozarks has been home to many water-powered grist mills providing that flour. Grist mills were an important step in converting grains into food. Mills also served as community centers and gathering places, perhaps a forerunner of the local coffee shop. Many of those mills no longer exist, others are slowly decaying, and a few have been preserved as historical monuments. Those mills that are still standing are worth seeking out, and a quick Internet search will reveal many intriguing possibilities for the adventurous. One mill that may turn up in such a search is Edwards Mill at College of the Ozarks (C of O), located just south of Branson, Missouri. However, it is a little different from most mills in the Ozarks. It is not hard to find, requiring no hiking or backroads driving. It is not old, having been constructed in 1972. And it is not decaying. Edwards Mill is still an active, working grist mill.

Located near Lake Honor on the C of O campus, Edwards Mill is a standard stop on the campus tour. Tourists can watch meal being ground, purchase mill products, and visit the third-floor weaving studio. Antique equipment and descriptions of the milling process are on display in the basement. Outside exhibits include old millstones from other mills.

Many visitors believe that Edwards Mill is historic, whether in its original location or moved from another spot. Although the mill was designed to look like a late 19th-century mill, the grand opening on October 7, 1972, was a celebration of new construction.



Outdoor Exhibit of Millstones

Edwards Mill was born from the collaboration of several people: Steve Miller, William (Bill) Cameron, M. Graham Clark, Ralph Foster, Hardy Wyman, and Hubert and Alice Edwards. Stories vary as to who had the original idea, but all were involved in bringing the project to fruition. Miller, most known as the artist who created the Branson Adoration Scene, was also the resident artist and director of the Ralph Foster Museum on campus. He created some preliminary sketches for Clark, the college president, and college benefactor Foster (Althoff 8). Cameron, Clark's friend, immigrated from Ireland to the United States in the 1920s. He spent nearly 50 years working as a millwright and mill product salesman in the Ozarks area (Watts 7).

(Edwards Mill continued on next page)

The group talked of moving an old mill from somewhere in the Ozarks and restoring it. However, when that idea failed to pan out, Foster contacted Hubert and Alice Edwards, who agreed to finance the building of a new mill under the direction of Hardy Wyman, the college's construction supervisor. Hubert Edwards was chairman of the board for the Dixie-Portland Flour Mills in Kansas City. Alice Edwards was the daughter of that company's founder (Watts 7). In addition, both served (or would serve) on the college's board of trustees. It was decided to name the mill in their honor (Godsey 613).



The three-story building was designed by Miller, who copied the roofline of Jolly Mill in Newton County (Althoff 8). When it opened, the mill was 80 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 40 feet high. As Miller put it, "I found out why they made 'em so tall . . . you need height to get the flow of the grain right" (Althoff 8).

And although the mill itself isn't all that old, some parts of it are. The iron hubs of the waterwheel were salvaged from Jackson Mill on Beaver Creek near Ava, Missouri. Heavy timbers were recycled from Globe Mill in Carthage.

The four millstones (millstones, or buhrs or burrs, always come in pairs) came from a mill in North Branch, Minnesota. More than 125 years old when installed, those millstones were a model known as the "Queen of the South," manufactured by the Straub company in Cincinnati, Ohio (Dardenne). A special artifact still on display is the toll barrel. This barrel, carved from the trunk of a single sycamore tree, came from the mill on Turnback Creek in Lawrence County, Missouri. Farmers who brought grain for grinding would deposit a portion of the finished product in the barrel as payment for the job (Althoff 10).

Newly fabricated items also found their way to Edwards Mill. The sifter was constructed and donated by the Great Western Manufacturing Company of Leavenworth, Kansas (H. C. Edwards). Glass for the windows was handblown by a West Virginia company (Ruth). Part of the décor includes a large map painted by Miller showing locations of other Ozarks mills.

Water can be diverted from Lake Honor through a raceway to power the overshot waterwheel, but that rarely happens today. All grinding is now done with electrical power, with the waterwheel turning only for demonstration purposes. In addition to the electrical power, other changes over the years include the construction of a storage building, sorghum mill, and elevator.

The four millstones have been replaced by two which are even older, having been originally installed in a Kentucky mill in the 1820s. The USDA and FDA regulations have also necessitated some new equipment

(Edwards Mill continued on next page)



over the years. The newest piece of equipment, installed in 2019, is a bulk bag filler. Bags of cornmeal and baking mixes are now filled mechanically instead of by hand (Dardenne).

Health-conscious consumers will be glad to know that corn ground today at Edwards Mill is certified organic and comes from a distributor in Illinois who can trace every batch of grain to the field it grew in.

Stone-ground meals may also be healthier because grinding with a stone produces less heat than a roller mill. Heat during grinding degrades enzymes and nutrients in grain, making that loaf of bread a little less nutritious if the flour was produced in a roller mill (Dardenne).

Corn at Edwards Mill is ground in 250- or 500-pound batches before being packaged in 2-pound bags. In addition to cornmeal, a variety of other baking products are also mixed, bagged, and sold at the mill. Sales peak in the fall with ninety percent of annual sales occurring in the fourth quarter (Dardenne).



Edwards Mill Waterwheel

As Edwards Mill approaches the half-century mark, it continues to be a vital and active part of its community, much like those grist mills of old. It provides jobs for the C of O work-study program and income for the college from the sale of mill products. It also preserves the world of the 19th-century Ozarks mill for today's 21st-century visitor curious to know what is "back of the flour."

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-- Photos courtesy of Gwen Simmons

## Wren Family Album

by Bob Kipfer

Summer is the time when birds are raising a family. The first clue may be a bird flying with twigs, leaves, or even strings, the elements of nest construction. By watching closely, you may be able to find their nests and watch the family develop.

Once you have found the nest, you should make your visits brief, just for a minute to avoid disturbing the family. A quick photograph is a good way to follow the development of the family.



Initially the parents will be incubating the eggs. They will be leaving the nest only for a couple of minutes to avoid chilling their brood. In some species, only the female broods the eggs while the male hangs around nearby.

Once the eggs have hatched, the pace picks up as the parents begin flying on the hunt for insects to feed their young. The naked chicks initially sleep soundly, but in a few days they may respond to your visit with open mouth, expecting a nice juicy caterpillar.



Over the next couple of weeks, the chicks start to develop their feathers, a look that resembles a tousled look of a "bed head." During the third week, they will lose some of their fluff and start to look more like a teenager.

Birds often fledge during the third week. It is important at this time to avoid disturbing them as premature fledging puts them in danger of entering the cold cruel world before they are prepared.



Safe nest-watching pointers are available at the [Nestwatch.org](https://www.nestwatch.org) Code of Conduct.

-- Photos used by permission of Ben Caruthers.

## The Book Bag

*In this section, we will occasionally review books and other resources of interest to members of The Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters and to any readers who share our goal and areas of concern. If you wish to submit a book review or suggest a resource you would like to have explored in The Book Bag, please contact us.*

### Review by Hayden Head

In September of 1907, two books about the Ozarks were published; one you've probably heard of, *The Shepherd of the Hills* by Harold Bell Wright, and the other you probably haven't, *Hester of the Hills* by Grover Clay. Poor Grover—regardless of what success he may have achieved in the early 19th century, he doesn't even have a Wikipedia page today, a sure sign of authorial oblivion. Nevertheless, Clay's novel *Hester of the Hills* remains an interesting read precisely because it couldn't have been influenced by its much more popular rival. *The Shepherd of the Hills* was the first million-selling novel in American publishing history, and we can only assume that every subsequent novel about the Ozarks owes at least some debt to Wright's masterwork. In the case of *Hester*, this couldn't have been the case. Nevertheless, the two novels share some important themes—the artificiality of city ways in contrast to the simplicity of hill customs, the allure of a naïve but teachable country girl, and the role of nature in shaping a person's character. In the end, however, *The Shepherd of the Hills* and *Hester of the Hills* present very different perspectives on the Ozarks, the first idealized and the second, well, that's the question at hand.

Coincidentally, both novels begin very much the same way: An outsider, a man from the city, enters the secluded world of the Ozarks. In *Shepherd*, that man is Daniel Howitt, a preacher from Chicago who comes to the hills to mourn the death of his son. In *Hester*, the outsider is Sidney Stanton from St. Louis, a land speculator who has purchased several thousand acres of rugged Ozark hill country. Both men bring with them a sense of order: In his role as a minister and teacher, Howitt, whom the locals will call "Dad," fosters a moral and spiritual order for the people of Mutton Hollow; in Sidney Stanton's role as a speculator, he fences off his monumental parcel and prevents hillbilly homesteaders from clearcutting the forests. Dad and Sidney are "civilizers" according to their own character.

Furthermore, the heroines of both novels are similar in that both Sammy Lane and Hester are represented as extensions of Nature, and more specifically, of the Ozark hills themselves. As most of us know, Sammy Lane has long been engaged to Ollie Stewart, a young man weak in character who adopts the attire and manners of the city as thoughtlessly as a chameleon changes color. Having become a "city feller," Ollie is ashamed of Sammy's rural rearing, and sensing his shame, Sammy appeals to Dad to teach her "how to be a lady." Dad agrees and the lessons begin. The irony of Sammy's education lies in the fact that Dad despises the urbanity and pseudo-sophistication of the city (he despises Ollie, too, but that's another matter), while he admires Sammy's innocent, artless, *natural* character. Consequently,

(Review continued on next page)

Dad teaches Sammy to be more of what she is already is: free and independent and confident in the strength of her “young womanhood.” Here’s how Wright describes Sammy:

[She] knew nothing of the laws and customs of the, so-called, best society. Her splendid young womanhood was not the product of those social traditions and rules that kill the instinct of her kind before it is fairly born. She was as free and as physically perfect as any of the free creatures that lived in the hills. And, keenly alive to the life that throbbed and surged about her, her woman’s heart and soul responded to the spirit of the season. The droning of the bees in the blossoms that grew in the cranny of the rock; the tinkle, tinkle of the sheep bells, as the flock moved slowly in their feeding; and the soft breathing of Mother Earth was in her ears; while the gentle breeze that stirred her hair came heavy with the smell of growing things. (68)

The hills of the Ozarks are Dad’s ally in Sammy’s education, and reclining on her “lookout,” Sammy receives into herself their life and spirit; at the same time, the spirit of the hills finds its perfect correspondence in Sammy.

Hester, too, possesses something of the character of the hills in her physical being, but in a much less idealized form. Consider Sidney’s introduction to Hester:

‘I am very glad to know you, Miss Wallace,’ Sidney said in his best manner; and as the girl passed her hand, he took it. It was rough and lumpy, but not nearly as large and heavy as he had supposed. There came from it, moreover, a virile grip, altogether different from the dead fish tail touch he so frequently encountered in the hand-shake of women. . . . Her eyes . . . were hidden under their lowered lids, giving him, however, good opportunity to admire the long lashes and the brows well defined and but slightly curved. But there was no pretty contrast of cream and crimson in the hard wind-beaten complexion, and her lips, though red, were dry and chapped. (38).

The obvious difference between the two women is that Sammy’s beauty is one with the beauty of the hills, while Hester’s beauty is diminished by her hardscrabble existence.

Consider, too, a peculiar passage at the beginning of *Hester* in which Sidney imagines the Ozarks as a shabby woman. He looks at the forest covered in snow and thinks:

Your fluffy hair is not the toy of the morn’s caressing breeze, but your head and shoulders are swathed in a shabby clout, as worn and weather-beaten as the shingles on the back-broken roof of your father’s shack. The bodice of your dress is not resplendent in pink and green, and the contours of your hip and bust are not proud: your lines are indistinguishable and flat, and your person sloppily housed in a dowdy garment that seems all skirt, the dripping hem of which you have hiked high with your left hand. (9)

Sidney sees the Ozarks and Hester as requiring his ministrations, for both are irredeemably coarse if left to themselves. He, on the other hand, is confident in his business prowess, his education, and his physical strength—in short, in his ability to navigate successfully the intricacies and expectations of life

(Review continued on next page)

in the city. In his arrogance, Sidney sees the hills, and Hester, as ripe for his exploitation. Sidney persuades his cousin, Sylvia, to take Hester into her home to train her in the ways of citification, whereupon he returns to St. Louis to mind his affairs. Sidney eventually returns to the Ozarks, first, to gauge the success of his experiment, and second, to claim Hester as his wife—if her progress has been satisfactory. Suffice it to say that Sylvia overcomes the deficiencies in Hester’s education and the hardening effect of life in the hills to make Hester acceptable to Sidney. Whether or not Sidney himself merits such a wife is the plot of the story. Spoiler alert: He doesn’t, and she runs away but then goes back to him anyway because “he doesn’t hit her.” Not exactly the “happily ever after” we were hoping for.

While both Sammy and Hester undergo a Pygmalion-like transformation, Wright’s optimistic treatment of the hills and his characters—and of Sammy in particular—gives us a more satisfying story. (Also, Wright’s prose is not nearly as purple as Clay’s, which makes for a much better read.) Or put it this way: *Hester of the Hills* could never have turned Branson into a tourist town. Still, the question remains, which novel is truer to the reality of the Ozarks? I don’t think that question is easily answered, and here’s why.

I would like to propose a theory regarding the place of the Ozarks in the early-20th-century imagination. Freud published his *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, an auspicious date for a concept that upended our traditional notions of the Self. Freud suggested that the unconscious mind is the origin of our dreams, a kind of repository of repressed urges, unfulfilled wishes, childhood traumas, and recent impressions. Dream-analysis for Freud was an exploration of these dark places, so we could better understand ourselves. I think—*think*, mind you—that the Ozarks of the early-20th-century imagination were analogous to Freud’s unconscious mind.

All around the Ozarks was the bright, conscious activity of American westward expansion. But here in the very center of the country were the impenetrable valleys and primitive customs of a secluded people. I think that early-20th-century authors projected their own fantasies and fears onto the topography and inhabitants of the Ozarks, thereby revealing more about themselves, that is, the authors, than the actual people who lived here. For these authors, the Ozarks region was the hidden place of buried gold and the haunt of outlandish monsters, the graveyard of Spanish conquistadors and a battleground of feuding families, a limestone grotto with beautiful albeit feral girls as well as the home of unrefined but noble folk—and on and on. Before the railroads and the highways and the roller coasters and condos blasted the hills and stripped their crowns, before the caves were illuminated and the rivers dammed, I think the Ozarks constituted our national unconscious mind and were therefore a kind of invitation to dreamers and dream-analysis and dreams of wild variety. Who saw the Ozarks more clearly: Wright or Clay? It depends, I guess, on how we see the Ozarks ourselves.

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For topic ideas, see areas of interest on page 1. Submit the manuscript as a Word document. If content is based on research, list at least two sources, including one book (if possible). Wikipedia, ancestry.com, findagrave.com, and the like are unacceptable. Limit each in-text, direct quotation to approximately four lines (50 words or so). Quoted passages of greater length may require permission from the author or publisher to avoid copyright violation. For photos, identify the source of each and ensure permission is obtained for use. Be sure to include your name, address, phone number, and email address with your submission.

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