

# The SOCIETY of OZARKIAN HILLCROFTERS

Identifying and Preserving What Makes the Ozarks Exceptional

Volume 1 Issue 4 Winter 2021–22

## Message from Hillcrofters President

This winter in the Ozarks has been an exciting time. Not only has the Ozarks winter weather kept us on our toes with a few ice and snow events, but there has been a lot going on with the Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters. Sure, the colder temperatures kept us indoors more often, but even the snow and ice haven't kept the activities of the Society at bay.

In this issue, we will learn about the very successful Cabin Fever Variety Music fundraiser event that filled an auditorium on February 5, just a couple of days after a significant snow event!

We will also learn about the moving of the historic Notch Post Office building to the Shepherd of the Hills. The restoration and protection of the Notch Post Office have constituted an important project for the Hillcrofters. A couple of years ago, we raised the money to put a new roof on the building, essentially extending the life of the structure.

This issue contains several excellent articles that we feel you will enjoy. We will learn about bald eagles in the Ozarks from our editor, Marilyn Perlberg. Gwen Simmons writes about historic Doby's Hall at the College of the Ozarks. Ethan Smilie tells us about the interesting and unique author, Rose Wilder Lane. A Hillcrofter member provides information about an original Hillcrofter, May Kennedy McCord.

In addition, Hayden Head provides another one of his informative and entertaining book reviews. And Hayden Head and I present our interview with Gloria Stephens, a sexton who impressed us with her considerable knowledge of the people who once made their homes in the Eureka Springs area of the Ozarks.

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

### IN THIS ISSUE . . .

President's Message . . . . .	1
Upcoming Event. . . . .	2
News/Projects . . . . .	3
Board Minutes . . . . .	7
Articles Section . . . . .	8
Bald Eagles . . . . .	8
with related Poem . . .	14
Doby's Hall . . . . .	15
Rose Wilder Lane . . . . .	19
May Kennedy McCord . . .	23
The Book Bag . . . . .	24
A Sexton Conversation . . .	27
Guidelines for Authors . . .	32

And please remember to join us for this year’s Old Ozarks Settlers Days at the Shepherd of the Hills on Saturday, May 14, and Sunday, May 15. This weekend of Ozarks music, crafts, and presentations will not only be a lot of fun, but a portion of the proceeds will go to benefit the Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters. Details about the event are provided below.

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 the 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

\* \* \* \* \*

### Upcoming Event

#### Shepherd’s Old Ozarks Settlers Days

Located at Shepherd of the Hills

Saturday, May 14, 10:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.  
and Sunday, May 15, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The 2022 season of the Shepherd of the Hills Outdoor Drama begins the weekend of May 14 and 15. The Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters will help in this celebration of Ozarks regional history and heritage, and will receive part of the proceeds. Artisans, craftspeople, musicians, and historians will be featured. Live music and Ozarks-themed lectures are scheduled.

The entry fee at the gate is \$5.00, with free admission for children age 12 and under. The entry fee includes a self-tour through the historic farm. The playland, petting zoo, and minigolf will be available, along with food trucks.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Curtis Copeland – President  
Bob Kipfer – Vice President  
Crystal Copeland – Secretary

Susan Scott            Larry Sifford  
Tammy Morton        Jeff Michel  
Hayden Head         Ken Henderson  
Jeremy Lynn          Tom Motley  
Todd Wilkinson

#### NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

Curtis Copeland – Publisher  
Marilyn Perlberg – Editor  
Hayden Head  
Bob Kipfer  
Gwen Simmons

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

## News and Projects

### Dues Announcement

Members, we often receive inquiries such as, “How do I renew my annual membership in the Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters?” or “How will I know when to renew my membership?” We do have a renewal process in place. We send out member renewal notification postcards during the month of your original membership application. If you have a question about your renewal date, please contact us at the address on the right.

### Springfield-Harrison Road Project

Report by Tammy Morton and Russell Jackson

Over a year ago, Russell Jackson was searching for funding when the Hillcrofters became aware of his project and reached out. The project was to create a roadside park at the Murder Rocks area on his property. The location is along the old Springfield-Harrison Road, which played an important role in early travel and trade as well as the Civil War in the Ozarks.

Partnering with the Jackson family, local Boy Scout troops, and the Hollister School District, the Hillcrofters wrote and received a grant for this project from White River Valley Electric Cooperative.



**Murder Rocks photo by Russell Jackson**

Once completed, the area will have a safe parking area and walking trails with native trees and plants, as well as educational information. The area will be open to the public as well as school groups, free of charge. Additional details will become available in the near future.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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

Find our group page on Facebook

#### CONTACT US

Email:  
[information@societyofozarkianhillcrofters.com](mailto:information@societyofozarkianhillcrofters.com)

Traditional mail:  
 PO Box 682  
 Ozark, Missouri 65721

#### MEMBERSHIP

Individual Membership  
 - \$20 per year

Student Membership  
 - \$10 per year

Membership application forms  
 may 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

## Notch Post Office Update

Report and Photos by Jeremy Lynn

March 10, 2022, marked a new milestone in Ozarks history, specifically for Shepherd of the Hills country. Uncle Ike’s post office, located in Notch, Missouri, was built in 1895 and brought to fame by Harold Bell Wright’s immortal novel, *The Shepherd of the Hills*. Levi Morrill, founder of the Notch post office, was the model for Wright’s character of Uncle Ike.

The Morrill family owned the property where the post office sat. That property is now for sale. The Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters has a long history with Levi Morrill’s post office. Three years ago, the Hillcrofters raised money to have a new roof placed on it to help preserve it for future generations.

Members of the Hillcrofters have been involved in assisting a move to ensure the post office is preserved and held for future generations. Under the direction of Adam Marty, the post office was relocated to its new home. It now is situated at a “fork in the roads” just a stone’s throw away from Old Matt’s cabin on the Shepherd of the Hills homestead.



Many thanks go to Jeff Johnson of Shepherd of the Hills and his team for their vision and dedication to protecting our regional history. We Hillcrofters feel this is a perfect place for the post office. Just as Old Matt and Uncle Ike are interred next to each other at Evergreen, the structures that represent them will now eternally be connected as well.



Most of all, we thank Bob, Gina, and Shelley Morrill for allowing this move to take place.

Stay tuned for updates on the plans for and restoration of this iconic structure.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Cabin Fever 2022 Variety Music Show Fundraiser

Report and Photos by Curtis Copeland

The Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters would like to give an enormous thank you to so many that made the Cabin Fever 2022 Variety Music Show a wonderful, successful, and entertaining event!

First and foremost is the amazing audience that made it out on a chilly evening to enjoy the show. The energy, generosity, and love of the Ozarks expressed by this group of fine folks really added to the joy of the event.

Additionally, we are so thankful for the generosity of Vicki Robinson Benes and the wonderful volunteers who purchased, prepared, and served a delicious ham and bean dinner.

Also, we are so thankful to the New Testament Christian Church for hosting the event and to Norm Farnum for doing a fantastic job running sound.

We can't thank enough our wonderfully talented MC, Kelly Kenney, who is so entertaining as well as being a great auctioneer.



**Kelly Kenney, MC**

A big thank you to my fellow Hillcrofter board members that volunteered their time and talents to the event: Jeff Michel, Jeremy Lynn, Hayden Head and his wife Sue, Larry Sifford, Rob-Rene Flatness, Ken Henderson, and my lovely wife Crystal Copeland.

And thanks, of course, to the amazingly talented musicians that shared their talent and their time to create an awesome show: DA Callaway, Lonesome Road, Emalee Flatness and Larry Sledge, Missouri 65 and special guest, Dennis Pritchard!

Thanks to a fantastic audience, and to the hard work and talent of our volunteers and musicians, we raised funds for scholarships. These scholarships support youth engaged in learning traditional Ozarks music and instrumentation through the Ozark Mountain Music programs as well as several other projects that help to preserve Ozarks culture and history.

(Cabin Fever continued on next page)

**Cabin Fever Performers**



**DA Callaway**



**Emalee Flatness and Larry Sledge**



**Missouri 65: Gil Turk, Emily Garoutte,  
Hawken Boldman, Bryar Boldman  
Not pictured: Dennis Pritchard**



**Lonesome Road: Ron Pennington,  
Shelly Smith, David Maravilla, Robby Boone**

\* \* \* \* \*

## The Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters

from the Minutes of the Board Meeting

February 22, 2022

The officers, board of directors, and guests met at the JSO Office, 109 S. 2nd St., Ozark, and virtually through Zoom on February 22, 2022. The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. CST. Those in attendance were Curtis Copeland, Rob Flatness, Jeff Michel, Jeremy Lynn, Crystal Copeland; and guests Hawken Boldman and Emily Garoutte. The Board approved a motion by Rob Flatness to approve the previous minutes.

It was reported that the Cabin Fever event raised \$3,200. Larry made a motion, seconded by Crystal, that \$1,000 of this be given to OMMA. Approval was unanimous to combine this amount with \$1,000 not presented from the Old Country Fair. Curtis and Jeff will set a date to present \$2,000.

A Murder Rocks update disclosed that both parties have signed and notarized an access agreement with Murder Rocks LLC. A “kick-off” meeting was planned. Bill Stone offered a bulldozer, backhoe, and truck. Jeff offered a dump truck to haul rock. White River will provide mulch. The construction budget for the project is \$5,400; the kiosk budget is \$1,500. A firm completion date of August 1, 2022, was established. Larry seconded a motion by Rob to hire Bill Stone and Jeff Michel to complete the project within the budget. Approval was unanimous.

It was noted that the Garber Schoolhouse and State Park renaming project had not moved forward, but the building was secured for now.

Topics of new business included plans for the Old Settlers Days event scheduled for May 14 and May 15. Hillcrofters will provide speakers and help find musical acts but will also need volunteers. Different ideas were proposed but not solidified regarding gate fees/volunteers, a raffle or auction.

Crystal seconded a motion by Bob to hold monthly meetings. Approval was unanimous.

It was noted that MSU is heading the Smithsonian Folklife Festival project in Washington, DC, in 2023.

Rob moved to support the \$250/year lease for the Reeds Spring Hall of Fame. Hayden seconded the motion, and approval was unanimous.

The meeting turned to committee reports. Bob, Hayden, and Curtis of the newsletter committee agreed that the newsletters look great but possibly think about moving to a journal. Tammy asked any committee needing assistance to reach out to her. Hawken and Emily might help with social media. The Board visited about the Old Country Fair.

Jeff Michel spoke about the Mountain Grove Schoolhouse jams ongoing since 1980. The main needs are help with electric bills, propane, insurance, and equipment. Heather would have a monthly budget. Jeff will bring a number for the March meeting.

Rob moved to adjourn. Larry seconded, and none opposed. The meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Articles Section

### Bald Eagles in the Ozarks: A Wildlife Conservation Success Story

by Marilyn Perlberg

Photos courtesy of Angela Helbling

*The bald eagle is truly an all-American bird; it is the only eagle unique to North America.*

-- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Midwest Region



At the Second Continental Congress on June 20, 1782, the Founding Fathers designated the bald eagle as the national symbol. At that time, an estimated 100,000 bald eagle nesting pairs existed in territory that became the lower 48 states. An estimated 487 nesting pairs remained by 1963. In the state of Missouri by the late 1950s, no bald eagle nesting pairs existed at all.

#### **An Endangered Species**

Bald eagle numbers had declined over time for reasons of human encroachment, habitat loss, illegal shooting, pesticides, and poisoned baits. Entire eagle populations were threatened with extinction by 1940. That year, the U.S. Congress passed the Bald Eagle Protection Act to forbid the killing or possession of the birds.

Yet soon afterward, bald eagle numbers dropped dramatically. A major factor was the increasing use during World War II of the insecticide DDT. Viewed as a “miracle” pesticide, DDT effectively controlled insects. It also proved to be environmentally toxic. For bald eagles, whose food of choice is fish, the consequences were severe. Fish absorbed DDT through water runoff from pesticide-treated agricultural land. Pesticides accumulated in eagles and limited their ability to put calcium into eggshells. Nesting mother eagles unwittingly crushed their eggs.

(Bald Eagles continued on next page)



President John F. Kennedy expressed concern in 1961 to longtime Missouri conservationist Charles H. Callison, then of the National Audubon Society. “The Founding Fathers made an appropriate choice,” Kennedy wrote, “when they selected the bald eagle as the emblem of the nation. The fierce beauty and proud independence of this great bird aptly symbolizes the strength and freedom of America.” He added that “we shall fail our trust if we permit the eagle to disappear.”

John F. Kennedy endorsed the conservationist efforts of Rachel Carson, whose book *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, warned about the dangers of uncontrolled pesticide use and notably of DDT. In 1972, the Environmental Protection Agency banned the use of DDT nationwide because of risks to the environment, wildlife, and human health. In 1978, the bald eagle was listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 as endangered in 43 states, including Missouri.

Federal and state agencies took steps to create and restore eagle habitats, or at least prevent their continued destruction. Programs were established to educate the public about bald eagles and the benefits of reestablishing the species. Some states, including Missouri, set up hacking programs to encourage bald eagles to return. These programs were based on the tendencies of eagles at maturity.

At about four or five years of age, bald eagles are mature enough to choose lifelong mates. They tend to build their nests within 100 miles or so of the places where they hatched and fledged—became able to fly. Hacking encouraged an increase in eagle populations by raising eaglets in a state so that they will imprint and return, no matter how far they roam. Adult bald eagles are known to fly vast distances.



### **Missouri’s Hacking Program**

In 1981, Missouri began a hacking program. The state provided turkeys in an exchange that led to the acquisition of eaglets from the Great Lakes region and Alaska. For the program, the third chick that hatched was taken because it would be the weakest and least likely to survive. A bald eagle typically lays two to three eggs, with a survival rate of two.

The chicks were about six weeks old when they were taken and arrived in Missouri. They were kept in artificial nests built on hacking towers—cages about 12 by 12 feet square—elevated as high as 24 feet and in good nesting areas. Towers were located in the Mingo National Wildlife Refuge, managed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Schell-Osage Conservation Area, managed by the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). The MDC oversaw the effort, aided by the USFWS and Dickerson Park Zoo in Springfield.

To assure survival, the eaglets were fed through a small door. A human hand disguised to look like an eagle puppet was a technique used to ensure that the eaglets identified with eagles. If the eaglets

(Bald Eagles continued on next page)

learned to depend on humans, they would be unable to survive in the wild. MDC Resource Scientist Janet Haslerig, writing in the *Missouri Conservationist* (December 2016, pp. 12–13), described the process by including the account of ornithologist Brad Jacobs, who helped care for the birds.

Jacobs recalled climbing a 24-foot ladder twice a day to slip several large trout through the door without being seen. At 10 to 12 weeks old, the age when eaglets are ready to fledge, they were allowed to walk out onto branches attached to the tower. In about a week, the eaglets attempted flight. Some were able to fly, but others were not. Brad Jacobs retrieved the birds that crash-landed. He put them back into the cage until they managed a successful flight.



By the mid-1980s, Missouri's bald eagle population was on the way to recovery. By 1990, the MDC had released 74 young bald eagles. In 2008, an estimated 150 eagle nesting pairs existed in Missouri. By September 2021, the number had risen to 617 active nests. The designation "active" is applied when one or both adult eagles are spotted on a nest or near it, or if eaglets are observed. That's a remarkable comeback for bald eagles in Missouri.

Bald eagle numbers also increased nationwide. In 2007, the USFWS removed bald eagles from the endangered species list. In 2020, the USFWS reported 71,400 eagle nesting pairs across the lower 48 states. Bald eagle populations are doing well in Missouri and elsewhere, but they remain protected by federal laws such as the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Bald eagles by law cannot be captured, killed, or in any way disturbed. They remain a species of concern.



Primary conservation efforts in Missouri (and in other states) are now aimed at enforcement and education. Agents for the MDC try to ensure that state and federal regulations concerning bald eagles are enforced throughout the year, including regularly scheduled bald eagle counts. To educate the public, Eagle Days events are held each winter throughout Missouri. Live eagle programs are scheduled.

(Bald Eagles continued on next page)

An eagle named Phoenix was present, for example, at the Eagle Days celebration held in January 2022 at Clarksville, Missouri. Phoenix was an eaglet raised and released at the Schell-Osage Conservation Area. When she proved unable to survive in the wild, the Dickerson Park Zoo took her in and rehabilitated her. She has remained at the zoo since 1989 and helps the public gain an appreciation of her species.

The MDC follows a USFWS directive that states monitor their bald eagle populations at regular intervals. Ground and aerial surveys are conducted, always with care not to disrupt the eagles. The MDC conducts breeding surveys in the spring and wintering bald eagle surveys in December-January.

### **Eagle Watch Program**

In 2018, Janet Haslerig launched a citizen-science Eagle Watch Program to help MDC staff conduct the required bald eagle counts throughout the state. Members of the public may volunteer to locate and report the numbers of bald eagle nests in their respective areas. For information, email [EagleWatch@mdc.mo.gov](mailto:EagleWatch@mdc.mo.gov) or phone at 573-522-4115, ext. 3198. A website about the program may be accessed at <https://research.mdc.mo.gov/project/eagle-watch-program>.

### **A Bald Eagle Hotspot**

Opportunities are many to view bald eagles in Missouri, one of the top Midwestern states for these migrating birds. When lakes and rivers start freezing farther north, eagles head south to warmer waters. Table Rock Lake and the Shepherd of the Hills Fish Hatchery, southwest of Branson, are listed among the best locations for winter bald eagle viewing. The eagles catch fish in unfrozen waters.

The very coldest weather and early morning are the best times to watch for eagles. In the morning, their white heads glow golden in the sun. The birds are especially visible hunting and fishing in January. They are opportunistic eaters, taking the weakest prey. Their diet includes small mammals, turtles, crayfish, waterfowl such as ducks, and carrion. Bald eagles have even been seen scavenging in garbage dumps.



Mature bald eagles typically return from October through December to repair and refurbish an existing nest or build a new one. Eagles usually nest in January and February.

Nests typically are 4 to 5 feet wide and 2 to 3 feet tall. They can also weigh more than a ton and topple a tall tree. This is because bald eagles typically return each year to the same nest and add more sticks and twigs to it. Active nests have been observed along Table Rock Lake in Stone and Taney Counties and along Lake Taneycomo, which flows around the Branson city limits.

(Bald Eagles continued on next page)

Active bald eagle nests have been observed in the surrounding counties. In September 2021, 9 nests were counted in Stone County, 1 in Christian County, and 2 nests in each of the counties of Barry, Douglas, and Ozark. Based on older observations, 2 nests existed in Taney County, although it is certain there are more. As for viewing after the nesting season, bald eagles are thought to remain in Missouri all year round.

### **Bald Eagle Fast Facts**

- The term “bald” derives from the Old English “balde,” meaning “white-headed.”
- The bald eagle’s scientific name is *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, which, translated, means “the sea eagle with the white head.”
- An adult eagle’s wingspan from tip to tip is about 6.5 to 8 feet.
- An adult eagle weighs from 10 to 14 pounds, with males smaller than females.
- The largest eagle nest recorded was about 9 feet wide by 20 feet deep; it weighed more than two tons.
- A juvenile is mottled brown in color until it is 4 or 5 years old, when its head turns white.
- A wild bald eagle can live as many as 30 years. The oldest on record was 38 when it was hit and killed by a car.
- Bald eagles have been recorded diving for fish at speeds up to 100 miles per hour.
- Eagles remain threatened by illegal shooting; lead poisoning; collision with power lines, vehicles, and wind turbines; and habitat degradation.

-- Sources: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Missouri Department of Conservation

### **Acknowledgments**

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to MDC Resource Scientist Janet Haslerig for providing significant information by email, phone, and printed sources. I am grateful for her helpful comments. I am similarly indebted to MDC Media Specialist Francis Skalicky for responding to my questions by phone and providing information by email. Andy Forbes, former Missouri avian ecologist now with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and Mike Crocker of the Dickerson Park Zoo kindly provided information by phone. I thank them all. A special thanks is due Angela Helbling for providing the photos.

This article is an expanded and updated version of an account I previously published, as follows: “American Bald Eagles Soar High at Branson.” *NBranson ETC* (Branson, MO) 1, no. 3 (Hot Winter Fun 2008): 4–5).

(Bald Eagles continued on next page)



### Selected Sources

Major sources of information are the websites for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). For the USFWS, access <https://www.fws.gov/>. For the MDC, access <https://mdc.mo.gov/>. Sources abound for bald eagle research. The following is a very selective list.

“American Bald Eagle Recovery and National Emblem Commemorative Coin Act.”

108th Congress (2003-2004): Public Law 486.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-bill/4116/text>.

American Eagle Foundation. “Our National Symbol.” 2021.

<https://www.eagles.org/what-we-do/educate/learn-about-eagles/bald-eagle-usas-national-symbol/>.

American Eagle Foundation. “America’s Bird—The Bald Eagle.”

<https://www.eagles.org/americas-bird-the-bald-eagle/>.

“Bald Eagle.” <https://www.britannica.com/animal/bald-eagle>.

Brinkley, Douglas. “Rachel Carson and JFK, an Environmental Tag Team.” *Audubon* (May-June 2012).

<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/may-june-2012/rachel-carson-and-jfk-environmental-tag-team>.

Chasteen, Bonnie. “Nature Lab: Eagle Watch program.” *Missouri Conservationist* 81, no. 12 (December 2020): 4.

Haslerig, Janet. “Monitoring Bald Eagles in Missouri.” *Missouri Conservationist* 77, no. 12 (December 2016): 10–15.

McDonald, Trevor. “Clarksville Eagle Days Prepares to Take Flight.” January 21, 2022.

[https://www.hannibal.net/news/local/clarksville-eagle-days-prepares-to-take-flight/article\\_12421614-7a32-11ec-87ed-d7ea99b45f05.html](https://www.hannibal.net/news/local/clarksville-eagle-days-prepares-to-take-flight/article_12421614-7a32-11ec-87ed-d7ea99b45f05.html).

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. “The American Bald Eagle.” n.d.

<https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/celebrate/eagle.pdf>.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. “America’s Bald Eagle Population Continues to Soar.” March 24, 2021.

<https://www.fws.gov/birds/news/210324eagle-population.php>.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Midwest Region. “Bald and Golden Eagles in the Midwest.” May 5, 2020.

<https://www.fws.gov/midwest/eagle/Nhistory/index.html>.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Many thanks go to Tom Johnson for the poem that follows on page 13. It provides an apt conclusion to an article about bald eagles in the Ozarks – and it especially applies to those eagles who choose to nest in the lakes area of southwest Missouri and Branson.*

## Tourists

by Tom Johnson

Photos courtesy of Angela Helbling



Tourists are an Ozarks fact of life  
It seems they always are around.  
Often flocking to where  
Nature's beauty can be found.

Like seasons in the Ozarks,  
Tourists visit, and then they go.  
Some return with regularity;  
They, themselves, become the show.

Arriving late here every autumn,  
With their royal majesty,  
Soaring in the morning sun,  
Bald heads glowing for all to see.

As symbol of our great nation,  
Bald eagles fill our hearts with awe.  
They'll complete their Ozarks visit  
When ice at home begins to thaw.



\*\*\*\*\*

## Dobyns Hall at The School of the Ozarks

by Gwen Simmons

Photos courtesy of Lyons Memorial Library, College of the Ozarks



**Keeter Center**

A prominent landmark on the College of the Ozarks campus is the Keeter Center, known for its restaurant, hotel, and meeting space. The log structure might make one think of a national park lodge such as the Old Faithful Inn in Yellowstone or the El Tovar Hotel in the Grand Canyon. Those grand park hotels date back to the early 20th century when a rustic architectural style known as “parkitecture” was becoming popular. The style used native stone and wood to complement natural surroundings and was featured in entrance stations, museums, and signage (Parkitecture).

Although the Keeter Center is not in a national park and was built a century later, its roots can be traced to that parkitecture movement. The inspiration for the Keeter Center was the original building on the school campus. That building, named Dobyns Hall after the school bought the property at Point Lookout, was originally the State of Maine exhibition building from the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, Missouri.

As fair organizers were in the planning stages, each state was asked to provide a building and exhibit to represent it. Maine decided a log building would represent its north woods well and hired John Calvin Stevens of Portland, Maine, as the architect. Stevens, known for his “shingle” style, designed more than one thousand buildings in Maine. Like the contemporaneous parkitecture, Stevens’ shingle style focused on the use of natural materials and the blend of harmony with landscape (Burch).

Stevens and his construction foreman, Alfred Astle, harvested timber from the Maine woods and built the 160-by-140-foot structure in Maine, excluding the roof. When finished, each log was numbered and the building disassembled. The logs were loaded onto twenty railcars and shipped to St. Louis (Our Visitor 11), where Astle and his crew reassembled the building on a wooded hillside. The interior décor featured rocking chairs, exposed beams, and stone fireplaces (Buell 2272).

Fairgoers provided much positive feedback on the Maine building, with one group of St. Louis businessmen especially intrigued. When the fair closed, the businessmen purchased the building for \$2,000 and organized the Maine Hunting and Fishing Club. Another \$5,000 was spent to purchase two hundred acres of land along the White River near Hollister, Missouri (Big Club House 1). Once again, the

(Dobyns Hall continued on next page)

building was disassembled and moved, this time via the Missouri Pacific Railroad. However, as the rail line ended at Branson at that time, the logs had to be transported a few miles (either by wagon or ferry; accounts disagree) from the rail terminus upriver to the property (Maine's Building).

Reconstruction of the building involved some interior renovations. Large rooms were divided to provide fifteen bedrooms on the second floor along with storerooms and bathrooms. The first floor retained the original large entry hall and fireplace while also providing an assembly hall and dining room (Big Club House 1). One thing left undone was the installation of an adequate heating system. The second floor was entirely unheated, whereas the first floor had three coal-burning baseburners along with the fireplace (Godsey 217).



**Maine Clubhouse, 1909**

Unfortunately for the sportsmen, the club did not prosper. Lack of interest and the distance from St. Louis led to a foreclosure sale in 1913. Two years later, the property was again for sale. The School of the Ozarks (now College of the Ozarks) was interested. A devastating fire in January, 1915, had destroyed much of the campus, then located in Forsyth, Missouri. As school administrators looked to reopen for the fall term, they found the Maine building and property. Providentially, the asking price of \$15,000 was the exact amount of the insurance settlement from the January fire (Godsey 638). Once the transaction was complete, the school relocated to Point Lookout, where it remains today.

Other structures, including chicken houses, a hay barn, and a corncrib were also on the property. A well-established orchard included eight thousand fruit trees. An annex had been added, providing a kitchen and pantry. Staff and students spent the summer preparing the building, but as student Clarence Parkey said, "There really wasn't much to get ready . . . we didn't have to do much except clean out the basement under the kitchen. There was a wagon load of wine bottles down there" (Godsey 216-217). In addition to getting rid of the wine bottles, a list of immediate needs included fence repairs, spraying and pruning the orchard, and installing small room heaters (Maine Club).

Official dedication ceremonies were held October 28, 1915, at which time the building was renamed Doby's Hall. William Ray Doby's had served as president of the board of trustees for sixteen years. A chapel in the north wing was named Mitchell Chapel in honor of Kerr Murray Mitchell, another board member. The Mitchell name traveled from Forsyth as the recently burned building there had also been

(Doby's Hall continued on next page)



named for Mr. Mitchell. The multi-purpose Dobyms Hall served as dormitory, classrooms, dining hall, kitchen, library, and teachers' living quarters (The School of the Ozarks).



**Dobyms Hall**

It didn't take long for the campus to grow, and by 1917 other buildings were available for use. However, Dobyms Hall continued as the focal point of the school. When Dr. Robert M. Good assumed the school's presidency in 1921, his living quarters were a screened-off room on the porch (Godsey 259). Administrative offices were housed in Dobyms Hall until the Green Building opened in 1929. And, despite complaints about the cold and drafty rooms, Dobyms housed female students and teachers until 1930.

Then, shortly before noon on February 1, 1930, shouts of "Fire!" rang out on campus. Smoke was billowing from the roof of Dobyms Hall, with flames not far behind. As staff and students gathered on the lawn, Gertrude Collins, a high school junior, "ran toward the old log building, yelling, "Bertha's in there. I know she is!" (Godsey 307). Gertrude's younger sister Bertha was taking a bath when she heard a commotion. When she got out of the tub, she could smell smoke and hear screaming. She quickly grabbed a coat and made her way to safety just before flames cut off the exit. With Bertha out of the building, all students and staff were accounted for.

None of the furnishings or possessions of those who lived in the building could be saved. An effort was made to save the nearby print shop and equipment, but they were soon gone. Oil-treated logs and an asphalt roof burned quickly, and the building was destroyed in less than an hour. Although the cause of the fire was not known, suspicion centered around a hot stove. A recently discovered motion picture of the fire shows the ferocity of the flames and the total devastation left behind. Only a stone fireplace survived. Damages were estimated at \$50,000, but insurance covered only \$10,000 (Godsey 306).

The loss was felt keenly as the country was in the midst of the Great Depression and funds were in short supply. Compounding the loss in 1932 was the death of the building's namesake, Dr. Dobyms. While his career as a minister and leader in the Presbyterian denomination took him to other parts of the country, Dobyms had remained interested in the school's welfare until his death (Godsey 321). The restaurant at today's Keeter Center is named in his honor. The land that Dobyms Hall sat on eventually became the location of today's Williams Memorial Chapel, where a sign near the chapel's front steps commemorates the lost building.

(Dobyms Hall continued on next page)



**Keeter Center**

Seventy years after that fire, Doby's Hall was reborn, in a sense. The building served as the architectural inspiration for the Keeter Center, dedicated in a ribbon-cutting ceremony on September 16, 2004. The exterior of the hotel and restaurant copies the exterior of Doby's Hall. Logs and natural stone emphasize the rustic style, along with a massive fireplace and rocking chairs. Drawing on both parkitecture and shingle styles, the Keeter Center pays homage to Doby's Hall. For without Doby's Hall, there might not be a College of the Ozarks today.

#### **Works Cited**

- "Big Club House at Branson." *Taney County Republican*, 18 July 1905.
- Buell, J. W., ed. *Louisiana and the Fair: an Exposition of the World, Its People, and Their Achievements*. World's Progress Publications, 1904.
- Burch, Kate. "The Summer Cottages of John Calvin Stevens." *Greater Portland Landmarks*. [www.portlandlandmarks.org/blog/2020/8/20/the-summer-cottages-of-john-calvin-stevens](http://www.portlandlandmarks.org/blog/2020/8/20/the-summer-cottages-of-john-calvin-stevens). Accessed 16 July 2021.
- Godsey, Helen and Townsend. *Flight of the Phoenix*. School of the Ozarks, 1984.
- Maine Club*. [Date unknown] Townsend Godsey collection, GO:SO 029, Ozarkiana Collection, College of the Ozarks.
- "Maine's Building at World's Fair, Later Famed Millionaire's Retreat in Ozarks, May Become Orphan's Home." *The Missouri Republican*, 31 January 1915.
- Our Visitor*. The School of the Ozarks, November 1923.
- Parkitecture in Western National Parks*. National Park Service, n.d. [www.nps.gov/hdp/exhibits/parkitect/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/hdp/exhibits/parkitect/index.htm). Accessed 14 July 2021.
- The School of the Ozarks, Hollister, Missouri*. School of the Ozarks, n.d.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Rose Wilder Lane

by Ethan Smilie

Rose Wilder Lane is now the relatively unknown daughter of a very famous mother, Laura Ingalls Wilder. However, for much of her life, her fame was vastly larger than her mother's. What is more, her own efforts helped to ensure that her mother's fame would eclipse her own.



Rose was born outside of the town of De Smet in what was then Dakota Territory (now South Dakota) on December 5, 1886, to Almanzo and Laura Ingalls Wilder. An account of her birth and early life can be found in *The First Four Years*, an unfinished, posthumously published novel by her mother, which is now often included as the ninth and final book in the *Little House* series. Rose's family suffered from many misfortunes in her early life: poverty, blizzards, drought, crop failures, her parents' bout with diphtheria (which left her father crippled for the rest of his life), the loss of their house due to fire, and the death of her infant brother. After these failures, her parents gave up farming in Dakota. For some time they lived in town, finding what work they could; [semicolon added] they spent some time recuperating with Almanzo's family in Spring Valley, Minnesota, and they tried to start a farm in Florida.

Lured by fliers advertising the "Land of Big Red Apples" in the Missouri Ozarks, the Wilders left Dakota in 1894. An account of their journey to Mansfield, Missouri, in the form of Laura's diary entries was posthumously published as *On the Way Home*. Still impoverished, Rose's childhood in Mansfield was in some ways more difficult than in De Smet, as she was separated from extended family and treated as an outsider, a notion reinforced by the fact that her parents made her ride a donkey, which she named Spookendyke, into town to school. Despite a number of conflicts with teachers and peers, Rose nonetheless excelled in academics and was a voracious reader. At age 16, she left home to live with her aunt, Eliza Jane Wilder Thayer—Laura's antagonistic teacher (and future sister-in-law) of *Little Town on the Prairie*—in Crowley, Louisiana, where she graduated from high school.

Thereafter, Rose set forth on the life of the up-and-coming bachelor girl, learning telegraphy and typewriting and landing jobs in Kansas City. Here, she probably first wrote for newspapers and likely met her future husband, Claire Gillette Lane, whom she usually referred to by his middle name. They married on March 24, 1909. Like both her mother and maternal grandmother ("Ma" of the *Little House* books), early in her marriage Rose lost an infant male child. The couple eventually settled in San Francisco, dealing in real estate. In fact, Rose was one of the first female real estate agents in California.

(Rose Wilder Lane continued on next page)

Rose renewed her newspaper writing during this time with the *San Francisco Bulletin*. On the fringe of yellow journalism, her articles often contained fanciful details and inventive dialogue. Her successes as a newspaper columnist led to her authoring a series of biographies—several unauthorized and containing dubious information—over the likes of Henry Ford, Charlie Chaplin, Jack London, and Herbert Hoover. In 1915, San Francisco hosted a world’s fair, and Rose received a visit from her 48-year-old mother (the letters Laura sent back to Almanzo during this trip were posthumously published as *West From Home*). Besides visiting the fair and seeing notable sights around San Francisco, the two women used this time to workshop Laura’s writing. Watching Rose work and receiving her advice helped Laura become a prolific farm journalist during the next decade.

Likely by the time Laura arrived in San Francisco, Rose and Gillette’s marriage had effectively ended. Their divorce was finalized in 1918, and Rose would never marry again. After the end of World War I, Rose took a job publicizing the European relief efforts of the Red Cross and, later, the Near East Relief. From 1920-23, Rose traveled throughout Europe, seeing both vast destruction and despair as well as beautiful scenery and cultures, and writing about it all. In Albania, while sick in a hostile environment, she was rescued by a young orphan named Rexh Meta, whom Rose would informally adopt and whose Cambridge education she would later fund.

Rose returned to Mansfield for Christmas in 1923. She remained home a relatively short time, during which she worked on writing stories, some of which were set in the Ozarks. A number of such stories, likely fictionalized portraits of Mansfield life and residents, were later published as collections in *Hill-Billy* and *Old Home Town* (her novel *Cindy* is also set in the Ozarks). She returned to Europe in 1926 and made her residence in Albania until returning to Mansfield in 1928.

Here, she would remain, except for some short intervals, until 1935, often visited by one or more friends for long-term stays. Initially, she inhabited the top floor of her parents’ farmhouse, where she sat typing her stories. With several lucrative publications and likely the desire to not share a house any longer with her parents, she built them an English-style cottage (the “Rock House”) on the back portion of their farm, a walkable distance from the Rocky Ridge farmhouse Laura and Almanzo had spent years designing and building (both houses can be toured as part of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Historic Home & Museum, located a mile east of Mansfield). Rose’s additions to the architectural plans would eventually double the original price and make the construction ostentatious in the region. At Christmastime in 1928, Laura and Almanzo moved into their new home, leaving Rose in the one they had worked so hard to build.

Less than a year later, the stock market crash destroyed Rose’s savings account, but this dark time set up one of the most productive and lucrative periods of both her and her mother’s writing careers. In 1930, Laura completed a draft of a manuscript titled “Pioneer Girl,” a straightforward autobiography of her childhood up through her marriage. Rose sent versions that she had edited and altered to her literary agents, initially with no success. Eventually, a version that Rose had cut down to contain only the

(Rose Wilder Lane continued on next page)



account of her mother's youth in the Big Woods of Wisconsin received interest for a juvenile market. Once expanded by Laura, with Rose's aid, the manuscript was accepted by Harper & Brothers, titled *Little House in the Big Woods*, and published in 1932.

Thus was the start of the *Little House* series completed seven books later in 1943. During this time, while both living nearby and away (and corresponding via mail and telephone), Rose would help her mother produce this monumental series. The extent of her collaboration is a matter of significant debate among Wilder scholars, covering the spectrum from mere copy editor to primary author/ghostwriter.

While her mother was becoming famous in the juvenile market, Rose was also producing some of her most lucrative publications. Also parallel to her mother's career at this juncture is the subject matter of her fiction: her novels *Let the Hurricane Roar* and *Free Land* both fictionalize material from her parents' and her maternal grandparents' (Pa and Ma's) lives. During her occupancy of Rocky Ridge farmhouse, Rose informally adopted two runaways, John and Al Turner, whose behavior was not always acceptable to Laura or the residents of Mansfield.

In 1935, Rose left Mansfield never to live there again permanently (and her parents promptly moved back into their farmhouse). Initially, she took up lodging at the Tiger Hotel in Columbia, Missouri, to be near the university library as she worked on an ultimately never-to-be published history of Missouri. By 1938, she had taken up residence in Danbury, Connecticut, where she would live until 1965. While she continued to assist her mother in her publications, Rose's fiction writing came to an end in the late 1930s. Thereafter, her writing focused on political philosophy.

An avid anti-New Dealer and conscientious objector to Social Security, she became one of the founders of modern American libertarianism. Her most comprehensive political work, *The Discovery of Freedom*, sets forth the foundations of her political thought. Such thought is intermingled in most of the remainder of her publications, even among descriptions of stitches contained in her *Woman's Day Book of American Needlework*.

After the death of her mother in 1957 (her father had died in 1949), Rose managed her estate and literary reputation, carefully concealing the hand she had in the production of the *Little House* series. For a final time she informally adopted a young man, this time her "grandson," Roger Lea MacBride, a lawyer and future politician enamored with her libertarian philosophy. After her death, he would inherit her estate, which, contestably, contained the rights to the *Little House* books, though Laura had left provisions that such rights would go to the Wright County library in Mansfield (after his death, the dispute was settled out of court, with the library receiving a cash settlement and MacBride's estate retaining the rights). MacBride was instrumental in the creation of the hugely popular television series based loosely on the novels.

(Rose Wilder Lane continued on next page)

Rose moved for a final time in 1965, this time to Harlingen, Texas. That year, she became the oldest journalist to travel to Vietnam, reporting on the war for *Woman's Day*. Three years later, though dealing with self-diagnosed and untreated diabetes, a condition that ran in the family, she was planning a trip around the world. The night before departing, October 30, 1968, she died in bed. Rose is buried in the Mansfield cemetery, next to her parents.

#### Author's Note on Sources

Because of her friendship with Herbert Hoover, the papers of Rose Wilder Lane, including much correspondence with her mother, are housed at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa. For a comprehensive biography of Rose, see William Holtz's *The Ghost in the Little House: A Life of Rose Wilder Lane* (1993). Caroline Fraser's recent biography of Laura, *Prairie Fires: The American Dreams of Laura Ingalls Wilder* (2018), also contains a great deal of information about Rose. Both authors speculate, though reaching different conclusions, about the exact nature of Rose's role in the composition of her mother's famous series.

\* \* \* \* \*



Members of the original Hillcrofters in downtown Hollister, ca. early 1930s. Otto Rayburn is the tall man in the front row, fourth from right. May Kennedy McCord stands to his left. Daisy Maxey is the spectacled woman at the right end of the back row. Photo courtesy of Branson Centennial Museum.

\* \* \* \* \*

## May Kennedy McCord

by a Hillcrofter member

Of all the “founders” of the Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters, perhaps none was more beloved than May Kennedy McCord, known throughout the Ozarks as the “Queen of the Hillbillies.” Beginning in 1932 and continuing for the next ten years, McCord penned her “Hillbilly Heartbeats” for the op-ed page of the *Springfield Leader and Press* (Larry Wood <https://ozarks-history.blogspot.com/2021/08/may-kennedy-mccord.html>). As the name suggests, “Hillbilly Heartbeats” was a living testament to all things Ozarks. Each column was a merry mélange of McCord’s observations on the Ozarks hills and hillbillies—she praised their virtues, forgave their foibles, and faithfully recorded their musings and doings. At the same time, she kept Ozarks culture alive by publishing personal anecdotes, original poems, and other creative snippets sent to her by readers.



May Kennedy McCord in 1934; photo by Vance Randolph  
Courtesy of Lyons Memorial Library, College of the Ozarks

McCord’s column was so successful that she was invited to present a radio program on KWK in St. Louis from 1942 through 1945, which led in turn to a Sunday morning program on KWTO in Springfield, Missouri, which was also called “Hillbilly Heartbeats.” The voice her readers could only imagine in her written columns came alive on her radio programs.

May McCord was especially committed to the Ozarkian Hillcrofters and their role in the preservation of Ozarks culture: “The Ozarkian-Hillcrofters is a unique society banded together for the preservation of the heritage of our pioneer forefathers. To keep intact, in so far as the onrush of civilization will permit, the lore, customs, traditions, beliefs, faiths, old ballads, recreation, forestry and wildlife of our early ancestors who made this great playground of America what it is. We believe that in their lives was much enduring beauty and courage and human interest. That their preservation is necessary to democracy. That they are a panacea in a mechanized age of speed. That this heritage is worthy of research and preservation” (*Rolla Herald*, 10 June 1943).

The writings and life of May Kennedy McCord are worthy of a book-length treatment, and apparently, such a book is forthcoming from the University of Arkansas Press (<https://ozarks-history.blogspot.com/2021/08/may-kennedy-mccord.html>). In the meantime, we can honor McCord’s love for the hills by remaining committed ourselves to the culture, traditions, and natural beauty of the Ozarks. That, after all, is the mission of the Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 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 of *The History of Mrs. Mollie E. Williams, Written by Herself*

by Hayden Head

Published by James Johnston, Searcy County Publications, PO Box 65, Marshall, Arkansas, 72650.  
Reprinted in 1992. First published in 1902. \$20.00

The most comprehensive and authoritative history of the Ozarks is Brooks Blevins' three-volume work, *A History of the Ozarks*, and every Ozarker should have a copy on his or her shelf. Blevins' work is particularly valuable in providing a broader context for the personal stories of Ozarkers. For example, in Volume Two, *The Conflicted Ozarks* (published by Illinois University Press in 2019), Blevins describes just how miserable life was in the Ozarks during the Civil War:

The Civil War in the Ozarks was a conflict of brutal and indiscriminate warfare. Armies of regular troops marched across the region, often living off the civilian populations in their paths, occasionally fighting traditional battles. Bands of men—some sanctioned by Confederate or Union authorities, others consisting of deserters and criminals—descended upon the farms and villages of the region like a plague of locusts, devouring what they needed, stealing what they coveted, destroying what they feared would be used against them. It was a war from which no one could escape, a conflagration that swept across prairies, down river valleys, over hills and through hollers, scorching a path of death and devastation. In the Ozarks the war truly pitted neighbors against one another; it forced them to take sides. (38)

Blevins goes on to say, "There is probably no quantitative way to judge one region's suffering in war in comparison with others'. If there were, you can bet that few places in North America bore the brunt of war as completely and devastatingly as did the Ozarks. . . . [T]he Ozarks became the ideal theater for unrestrained guerrilla warfare" (39).

To get a feel for the suffering and violence these outlaws visited on innocent noncombatants—principally, women and children, but also old men and wounded soldiers—I know of no better work than the firsthand account of one woman living in northwest Arkansas: *The History of Mollie E. Williams, Written by Herself*. Billed as *A Thrilling Romance of the Civil War* and subtitled *Forty-Two Days in Search of a Missing Husband*, Mrs. Williams faithfully records her early life, the onset of the Civil War, and the depredations of bushwhackers—who were ostensibly Southern sympathizers—and jayhawkers—who were ostensibly Unionists. I say "ostensibly" because concerning these "soldiers," Mrs. Williams writes:

(Review continued on next page)



The men engaged in this murderous and outrageous wing of the service belonged to both the Union and Confederate factions and were devoid of all honesty and every sense of justice and patriotism. It has been said that the war made thieves, murderers and prostitutes. This I deny. It only afforded such persons an opportunity to show their real characters. They were thieves, murderers and prostitutes before the war and were held within lawful bounds by the restraints of society; the war removed these restraints and enabled them to act out their true natures. But few persons at this advanced period know of the utterly depraved, cruel and malignant disposition of this class of merciless outlaws. (14)

Mrs. Williams was no stranger to loss and grief prior to the Civil War. Her mother died when she was ten; her father moved to Texas to seek his fortune there, and before leaving, he sent young Mollie to live with relatives in Arkansas. Two years later he died, and Mollie was an orphan. Her relatives were kind to her, but the work was difficult for them all. As she says, they provided their own sustenance through farming: from milking cows to hoeing cotton to carding and spinning the fibers, their labor was their life.

Still, there was time to fall in love—she tells how she attended a church service and heard “the strains of a clear, sweet masculine voice that at once attracted my attention.” When she met the singer, she “beheld a young man of medium height, with dark, curly hair and a face expressive of both firmness and kindness” (8). She did not have the opportunity to express her love for this young man until he stood on “the muster field” with other Confederate recruits: “I approached him with an earnest greeting that convinced him it indicated more than friendship. By some strange law of mind it seemed that he . . . was attracted to me as fully and strongly as I was to him” (10). Mollie writes that she later received a letter from her young lover written in his own blood: “Having no ink, [he] punctured a vein on the back of his hand and, dipping a pen point in the red fluid, inscribed the letter with his own blood.”

When Mollie later received word that her lover had failed to return with his company and was presumed dead, she was inconsolable: “What could I do now, an orphan girl and my lover cold and stark on the field of carnage? . . . I was desperate and only tolerated life because I could not die” (16-17). Not long after, she met another young soldier, Henry Cole, with whom she permitted herself to fall in love, though more out of necessity than affection: “Reader, judge me not as unfeeling and forgetful of my lover now cold in Death’s embrace! Remember, I was a thoughtless girl, only fifteen years old, alone and desperate and reaching out for sympathy and companionship” (17).

Henry Cole became her husband, but Mollie’s troubles were far from over. The “guerrilla ruffians” who plagued the countryside let it be known they were determined to murder Cole, so the couple was obliged to forego their honeymoon, deeming it safer for him to return to his command than to remain with Mollie. And still the pillaging and destruction continued: “Murder and arson were rife in the land and oftentimes tender youth fell a victim to the remorseless vindictiveness that seemed to have taken possession of four-fifths of the people” (18).

Mollie also recalls her mixed emotions of sorrow and relief at hearing the war was over: sorrow at the “Lost Cause” of Southern independence but relief that her “husband would soon be at home to assist

(Review continued on next page)

me to bear the burdens of life resting so heavily on my tired shoulders” (39). But he didn’t come home:

As she writes, a much deeper sorrow followed when she learned Henry had boarded a steamboat for his passage home only to be recognized by a bushwhacker who had persecuted Mollie and her family. Fearing that Henry would avenge their mistreatment, the bushwhacker killed Henry in cold blood and dumped his body over the side of the boat. According to a witness of the murder, the bushwhacker continued to fire shots into his body when it resurfaced.

Mollie refused to believe this news and so resolved to set out to find her missing husband, thus, the subtitle of the book. She and a companion, “a little girl,” set out on horseback to find Henry Cole. She described her mind as “bordering on the frantic—a compound of hope and despair” (40). But she writes,

It seems that there is no experience so unfortunate but that it can be made more so. It was heartrending to see the desolation the war had left in the lovely valleys at the base of the Boston Mountains. Where once were productive fields and prosperous happy firesides, was now a succession of neglected fields and abandoned homes. The devil in man could do no more; the destruction and devastation were complete. The once beautiful country was dead . . . (40).

This ravaged countryside was the backdrop for Mollie’s epic journey to find her missing husband. The two girls turned back after Mollie heard news confirming the account of Henry’s murder. After consulting with Henry’s sister, however, Mollie set off again, this time to recover his body. The story of her adventures in this quest is indeed “a thrilling romance.”

Mollie’s life continued to be exceptional with twists, turns, and coincidences worthy of Dickens. Nevertheless, one comes away from her memoir with the sense that this exceptionality was a result of Mollie Williams’ strength of character, her unyielding love, and her resolve to do her duty. In a similar vein, one might recall Maddie Ross in Charles Portis’ *True Grit* only to realize an essential difference: Mollie’s story was true.

\* \* \* \* \*

## A Conversation with Gloria Stephens, Sexton

by Curtis Copeland and Hayden Head

Back in the balmy days before Christmas of 2021, Curtis Copeland and I made a quick trip to Eureka Springs. (If you are familiar with Eureka, you know we didn't need a reason: Eureka Springs is its own reason.) We were driving into town on Highway 62 from Berryville when Curtis suggested we stop by the Odd Fellows Cemetery on Magnetic Mountain. I am not inordinately fond of graveyards but reluctantly agreed, principally because Curtis is such an agreeable fellow himself. Thus began one of those gentle adventures for which Eureka Springs is famous.

We hadn't been there long when we met an older lady, white-haired and bespectacled, with a blue cap and a clipboard, who introduced herself as Gloria and told us she was the sexton. Neither of us had met a sexton before—to be honest, I wasn't exactly sure what a sexton does—so we asked the appropriate questions and learned that a sexton tends a cemetery, not as a groundskeeper but as a memory keeper. In the past, sextons have also been responsible for taking care of churches, as well as recording graves and even selling plots. In her sixteen years as sexton, Gloria Stephens has mapped thousands of graves in the Odd Fellows Cemetery, and in the process, she has created a huge binder of names, dates, plots, and stories. With neither a hint of irony nor any inclination to the macabre, Gloria spoke with warmth of “her people” who are “gone but not forgotten” as they rest in peace on the side of an Ozarks hill. She showed us a few of her favorite headstones and told us a few of her favorite stories, and we quickly decided we had to pay Gloria another visit. So, it was that in early January, Curtis and I returned to Eureka Springs to interview Gloria Stephens at her home.

-- Introduction by Hayden Head

**CURTIS:** So, Gloria, have you always lived in Eureka Springs, and if not, how did you happen to come here?

**GLORIA:** No, I moved here from the suburbs of Chicago and lived in Iowa before that. My career had always been in sales. My sister and I decided we wanted to start a bed and breakfast in Eureka, but we got crossways. Very unfortunate. The positive side of that story is that I fell in love with Eureka and immersed myself in its history. I ran the visitors' center for the Chamber of Commerce for some time. I'm actually moving back to Illinois later this year to be closer to my son.

**CURTIS:** How did you become a sexton?

**GLORIA:** Ten years ago, I was serving on the cemetery commission in Eureka, then for one reason and another, I got off. A lady still on the commission was on a cruise in 2016. She called me because she had gotten word somebody needed to be buried. So, I ran to city hall to get info on the young man—you may remember his stone with the words “Drive fast and swerve.” After that, I was asked to be on the commission again. So, I went to the

(Stephens Conversation continued on next page)

meeting and held a bag of crystals in my lap to ward off bad feelings. A month or so later, they asked me to be the sexton.

**CURTIS:** How long have you lived in Eureka Springs now?

**GLORIA:** Sixteen years. One thing I've learned about Eureka: If she doesn't want you, she will spit you out. People who don't fit won't stay. And I'm not necessarily saying it's the people of Eureka who spit you out. It's deeper than that. My sister never felt at home here. But I went all around town introducing myself, and Eureka and I have gotten along just fine. I've never been to a bar in Eureka because I have too much fun when I go out—my clothes tend to fall off. You can't have the cemetery lady dancing naked on a table.

**CURTIS:** You must have mixed feelings about moving from a place you love so much.

**GLORIA:** I do. I was meant to be a sexton here. I was mapping graves for the commission even before I became a sexton. And since then, I've met many people, some are walkers, others walk their dogs here, and others are joggers. There are those who come to visit their loved ones. And of course, there are "my people" who are buried here. I'm going to miss them, so it will be bittersweet to leave.

**CURTIS:** You must have mixed feelings about moving from a place you love so much.

**GLORIA:** I do. I was meant to be a sexton here. I was mapping graves for the commission even before I became a sexton. And since then, I've met many people, some are walkers, others walk their dogs here, and others are joggers. There are those who come to visit their loved ones. And of course, there are "my people" who are buried here. I'm going to miss them, so it will be bittersweet to leave.

**HAYDEN:** How large is the cemetery?

**GLORIA:** I've mapped twenty and a half acres comprising 56 blocks. I've mapped some 5,000 graves, and I'm almost finished.

**CURTIS:** How do you find unmarked graves?

**GLORIA:** Well, I'll let you in on a secret: I use divining rods.

**HAYDEN:** Divining rods?

**GLORIA:** Yeah, like the old water witchers, except I use them to find graves. I'll admit I feel funny when I use them in front of people because they think it's spooky. But the rods work. I can even ask for a particular person, and the divining rods will tell me where that person is buried.

(Stephens Conversation continued on next page)



You may not know it, but there is a difference between a pauper's field and a potter's field. Folks could record information of people buried in the potter's field but not the pauper's field. But one of the old maps shows where the paupers are buried. If you remember the fountain where you entered the cemetery, well, the whole block to the left of that fountain was pauper's graves. People buried there could only have a disc with a number on it. Two years ago, I was poking around because they found a stone with a 1912 date; it belonged to a Daniel Huckabay.

There are also 77 unmarked graves. Ten graves were dug prior to the OOF [Order of Odd Fellows] cemetery that was started in 1889. The earliest marked stone here is dated July 1880.

You know that Highway 62 runs right by the cemetery. Well, the men building the highway were Black convicts. Their overseer, a huge fellow with a gold tooth, was named Goldie, and he would beat them and even shoot them. He told Mirt Meeks that they would just throw them in the trench, and we found the hollow that had thirty-two graves. These were the convicts who were killed building the highway. Many of them stayed at Leatherwood Creek and sometimes they would put on minstrel shows for the people of Eureka Springs.

**CURTIS:** Have you ever run into someone's remains while digging?

**GLORIA:** No. There are several different places I go to for research, so that doesn't happen: old maps, indexes, typed lists of deaths. Mirt Meeks, whom I mentioned before, was sexton from 1915 to 1928 or so, and his granddaughter who got his notebook copied everything. I was able to match the paupers with their graves using his book. There are 165 paupers we know of. As I say, potters can have their information recorded, but paupers cannot.

Several sections of the cemetery remain open, and often purchased lots are passed down to heirs. Records contain the deed numbers, so people know where the plots are. All of this information is essential in mapping the graves. So, I do have a method.

**HAYDEN:** We saw some of the stones on our previous visit. What are your favorites, if that's the appropriate word?

**GLORIA:** Annie Apple Vanmarm comes to mind—she was a beautiful girl, about nineteen when she died. She played a 12-string guitar. She even played with the Grateful Dead and designed all their tie-dye. She was killed in '91 when she was hit by a Walmart truck. She was buried in a wooden coffin, and each of her friends drove a nail in. Her grave looks Indian because of the mementos left there, but they are images and tokens of love, and many of them are tributes related to the Grateful Dead. The skulls and her boots are there. Her father was a famous musician in Chicago.

(Stephens Conversation continued on next page)

Sue Chipporas's grave is next to her, and her stone says, "No karate in the kitchen!"

I already mentioned the epitaph to you, "Drive fast and swerve." Another one says, "We don't rent pigs"—that's from *Lonesome Dove*. Then there is "Sail on pilgrim souls sail on," and one of my favorites is "I'm waiting. Won't you meet me at the gate?" Some of the epitaphs are poignant and some are funny; they are as personal and different as the people buried there.

**CURTIS:** Have there been any controversies? Seems like every occupation has some kind of dustup sooner or later.

**GLORIA:** Yes. The first thing you have to remember is that a cemetery is sacred. People who once hated each other now lie side by side in peace. That may be the main meaning of death: The past is what it is, and we in the present don't have the right to judge people, and we sure can't change the ones who went before us. Well, somebody came in the cemetery and began breaking flags that had been placed on Confederate graves. As I said, I'm from the North and have no special regard for the Confederacy. But the past is the past, and those who wish to honor their dead have the right to do so. Anyhow, we

replaced the flags, and whoever it was came in and broke them again. Then, they started stealing the flags. Finally, I was far away in the back talking with a couple from Oklahoma, when I saw a woman taking the flags from the graves. Colton, who is one of my realtors and a good friend, was parked angled in the road, and by the time I got there, he was saying to her, "I saw what you did." And she didn't deny it; she said, "Yes, I did it, and I'm going to keep doing it."

So, I asked her, "Who are you?" and she said, "I own a grave here." I said, "Well, I'm going to have you arrested for vandalism. I don't know of any plot with your name attached to it. I don't know who you are. And, besides, this is not your property. You are not allowed by law to remove anything from these graves." She made like she was going to drive off, and I stood in front of her jeep. The lady from Oklahoma came up and put her arm around me and asked me what I was doing because at that point, I could have been arrested, too, because I was detaining this woman. Eventually, everybody got involved: the mayor, the commission, the city council. The mayor stood by me, and the police did contact her.

We went around and around about those Confederate flags. Some people came to the city council meeting to protest the flags. They attacked Colton on Facebook, but he wrote a letter to the commission that was very eloquent. He argued that these soldiers may have been conscripted and forced to fight against their will; that some of them were as young as fourteen; and that slavery—which was all but nonexistent in this part

(Stephens Conversation continued on next page)

of the Ozarks—meant nothing to them. But that didn’t satisfy all the parties involved; I thought one city councilman was going to hit me, and some of the other men came to my defense.

**HAYDEN:** You bring up an interesting point with slavery. Were whites and Blacks treated differently in death?

**GLORIA:** Yes. When I first started this job ten years ago, I was surprised to see that Black gravestones had COL for “colored” on them. But in a way that’s good, because we wouldn’t have had any record of these people’s race otherwise. When you first come in the gate, you can see that this gate wasn’t original to the cemetery. This part of the cemetery was the southwest corner of the original cemetery and, in fact, was the colored cemetery. Richard Banks and Maddie Fanter are buried there. I heard from a white man named Fanter in Texas, and his family would have been Maddie’s owners. I found records that show the Fanters were purchased in Berryville for \$300.

Richard Banks’s home overlooked Barrel Springs Curve on Highway 62 West on the way to Thorncrown Chapel. He lived up on the bluff, and he would wave to people as they drove past. He would never go into a bar or a liquor store, but he would give money to a trusted friend to buy him five beers. And he wouldn’t go into a restaurant to eat; instead, they would pass the food out to him. Richard worked for a wholesale grocer, and he could carry a hundred-pound sack over each shoulder, one under each arm, and one hanging from his mouth. He was born in 1913, and he died in 1975.

**CURTIS:** Well, Gloria, we sure do appreciate your spending some time with us this evening. Eureka Springs is going to miss you. Would you be willing to share more of your stories about the people buried here from your new home?

**GLORIA:** It would be my pleasure. I’m going to miss Eureka, too. There’s no other town like it.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Guidelines for Authors

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.

### INTERESTED IN CONTRIBUTING TO OUR NEWSLETTER?

We invite readers to submit articles, notices of upcoming events, or other Ozarks-related information.

Contact us by email at:

information@  
societyofozarkianhillcrofters.com,  
or by traditional mail at:

PO Box 682  
Ozark, Missouri 65721

Please see Guidelines for Authors  
on this page.