

The History of GRAIN VALLEY, MISSOURI

Formed from two smaller towns in 1878, Grain Valley has been a city rich with history. With the westward expansion of the United States and the purchase of the Louisiana Territory in 1803 by President Thomas Jefferson, this area was destined to be settled. The journey of Lewis and Clark through this area established Fort Point, which later became Fort Osage. This fort was established as a part of the U.S. factory system for the purpose of trading with Native Americans and pioneers in the area.

The Osage tribe of Native Americans was located in this area. Their presence created an environment for trade that many Americans flocked to partake in. The abundance of animals for trapping and their valued furs caused Fort Osage to thrive. The settlements of Pink Hill and Stony Point were near this lively trading and trapping activity.

One of the towns from which Grain Valley grew was Pink Hill, which was located near the present Pink Hill Road north of Grain Valley, stated by Barbara Washburn, president of the Grain Valley Historical Society and a descendent of Britton Cappelle, founding citizen of Grain Valley. "Pink Hill was placed on the map by the United States Post Office in 1854, the year the town was born", wrote Pearl Wilcox in her book, Jackson County Pioneers. Pink Hill was located twenty miles east of Independence, Missouri and three miles north of Oak Grove, Missouri. Wilcox described Pink Hill as a thriving village that had two woodworking shops owned by Squire William and Phil Sterns, a blacksmith shop owned by Michael Womacks, three general stores and many residences built by J.D. Wood.

Erma Doty, a current resident of Grain Valley, wrote a history of Stony Point in 1934 while she was 12 years old and attended school at Stony Point. She is now a member of the Grain Valley Historical Society. Stony Point was located three miles south of Grain Valley. It was termed "Stony Point" because of the apparent numerous stones in the area. The Stony Point community was outstanding among all others because it could boast of having a school, church and store, or trading post as it was called in those days. There were only two trading posts in eastern Jackson County, one at Pink Hill and the other at Stony Point. Jacob "Jake" Gregg maintained both a post office and a trading post at Stony Point.

The prominent river town of Lexington was the main source for supplies, hauled by oxen-driven wagons to the Stony Point trading post and more than likely, the Pink Hill trading post. In 1858, the need for a place of worship brought the establishment of Pleasant Valley Baptist Church, located about two miles west of the store. During the Civil War, guerilla warfare was popular in Missouri because of mixed loyalties among residents. The military issued Order Number 11, which ordered residents who were Southern sympathizers to leave the county. "This was issued by Gen. Thomas Ewing on August 25, 1863", Doty wrote. "This shows the biting misery the people then had to endure on account of the fratricidal war which was being carried on, not by great generals and brave soldiers in open and honorable battle, but by roving bands of guerrillas of both armies, whose purpose was murder, rob and despoil, almost as much as to maintain the authority of the Union or establish the jurisdiction of the Confederacy."

In the confusion that followed, many were killed, including civilians and children. Total war had been declared on the state of Missouri in an effort to quell the guerilla uprising. The whole district soon presented a scene of desolation rarely equaled," Doty wrote. "Within fifteen days nearly every inhabitant had gone, and for a few years its history was blank." The destruction of property left behind was immense. Doty wrote, "When the settlers returned in 1866, not a vestige of their old homes was left." Many residents participated as guerillas while many relocated to other countries to avoid the wrath of war. William Quantrill and his guerilla band were active in this area. Once the war was over, many residents who had left returned and the area grew and thrived.

There were dedication services in 1871 for the Pink Hill Methodist Church, which became the mother church for Oak Grove, Grain Valley and Oakland Methodist churches. After the war, Marshall Crawford took over the post office and trading post. The old store had been destroyed, and another building was built about one-half mile west of the old one. The supplies for the new store were acquired from Kansas City in a wagon. Crawford's position as postmaster offered little salary other than 60 percent of the stamp sales. J.H. Cannon, who purchased the store in 1873, relocated when the Chicago-Alton Railroad came through; the railroad created a link between Quincy, Illinois and Kansas City, Missouri. Cannon also performed many marriages in his role as Justice of the Peace.

Both Pink Hill and Stony Point were waning in population because of the lack of transportation available. When the railroad came through, the two townships relocated at a midway point between them. They consolidated and formed the City of Grain Valley, Missouri on September 5, 1878 at a location near the main line of the railroad. James Lucas surveyed the land for Joseph Peters. The name for the city came from the abundance of grain in the area as well as the geography of the land. The railroad brought some growth and prosperity to Grain Valley.

In 1881 many businesses moved in, including grocery stores, a shoe repair shop, plus doctors and ministers. The Christian Church was built in 1883 and the Baptist Church in 1889. The Grain Valley Methodist Church, which had Rev. CF. Fontaine as its first pastor, was also built in 1889. The Pleasant Valley Church, after relocation to Perdee Chapel following the war, was sold creating proceeds for the Methodist Church in Grain Valley.

The Bank of Grain Valley was founded in 1905 with J.H. Webb as President and W.A. Cannon as Vice President, according to the "Official Report on the Resources and Opportunities of Jackson County, Missouri", published in 1926, in the Ledger Collection 1-18 of the Jackson County Historical Society Archives. During the Bank Crisis of 1933, the Bank of Grain Valley opened the day after the crisis as one of the strongest banks in the United States. The bank remains in operation today.

A newspaper, the Sni-A-Bar Voice, began publication in 1914 and lasted until 1926.

Sni-A-Bar Farm

In 1904, William Rockhill Nelson began buying land for a non-profit farm, called Sni-A-Bar

Farm, which would attract thousands of visitors to Grain Valley. The 2,400 acre farm was ready and registered with the state of Missouri in 1913 to show farmers better methods of raising cattle.

On page 4 of the Jackson County ledger collection 1-18 it states, "Most Famous Farms... Sni-A-Bar the greatest gift of any man to the beef cattle industry." In the same ledger collection it also states, "This famous farm was started in 1913 by Mr. Nelson as his gift to the improvement of conditions on corn belt cattle farms." Two years after the farm was registered, Nelson died. In his will he provided funding for the farm for 30 years. "All lands owned by me or belonging to said trust estate at the time of and after my death and situated in Sni-A-Bar Township, in Jackson County, Missouri, shall for a period of thirty years next succeeding my death be held, used, managed and controlled by said trustees for the purpose of the material and social betterment of the public and particularly of the people of Sni-A-Bar Township to promote and instill a better knowledge among them concerning stock breeding and raising, especially of cattle," Nelson wrote in his will.

The trustees were to be selected by the president of three colleges – University of Missouri-Columbia, the University of Kansas and the University of Oklahoma. The universities used the farm for experiments and studies, said Charlie Napier, a resident of Grain Valley who grew up on the Sni-a-Bar farm, moving there in 1922. Napier's father, James Napier, brought his family over from Scotland. He was hired at the farm as chief herdsman to oversee the show cattle. Showing shorthorn breeds seem to be an area reserved for Scots during this time period. The farm attracted thousands of visitors to Grain Valley because of annual events held there.

The first appointed trustees for the farm were J.C. Nichols, Herbert Jouis and Gov. Arthur M. Hyde. Of the three, only Jouis ever actually visited the farm. The trust was set up in such a way that Nelson's daughter, Laura Kirkwood, would run the farm until her death. She died in March 1926. In 1927, Napier's father became the manager of the farm. Many experiments were performed, and many cattle won prizes at competitions.

One animal, named 'Sni-A-Bar Control', was shown for three years and was never beaten in any show, being grand champion all three years. Control died at an east coast farm where she was for breeding. The farm found a better way of breeding, the reason the farm was started. The cure for Bangs disease was first tested there. Crops also were experimented with.

Charlie Napier became the chief show herdsman from 1934 to 1942. He also was the farm manager for three months during a time when his father went to Scotland to buy cattle. Napier said, "Dr. Sheets, who was head of the Bureau of Animal Testing for the U.S. Department of Agriculture in '34 and '35, said more than once, "They gathered more information from livestock experimentation at Sni-A-Bar farm than they did from all of the government experiment stations combined."

When the farm was being sold, bids came from J.C. Penney, Nell Donnelly Reed, wife of a congressman and actor Fred McMurray. But the farm was sold in November 1945 to Ralph L. Smith because he had already owned two farms and he had no intention of dividing the farm up. Smith bought the farm for \$387,000 – an astounding \$110.00 per acre. Charlie Napier said the cattle, sold separately, brought in a higher dollar amount than the farm, even with all of the

buildings and barns that came with it.

In 1947 Smith sold the farm to Ray Batmann, who paid two times the price Smith paid for it, Napier said. It was at this time that Napier's father finally left Sni-A-Bar. The glory days of Sni-A-Bar Farm were over, as its condition deteriorated under Batmann's administration. The county health department was called out on more than one occasion because of the stench of dead cattle. Finally, he began selling pieces of the farm.

Recent History

Grain Valley was incorporated as a fourth class city in 1945. The first school, completed in 1889, was replaced by a brick building in 1908. However, that building burned down November 7, 1925. Up to 1995 six school districts combined to form the Grain Valley School District. Many of these districts were one-room school buildings such as the one Doty attended; her school closed in 1935.

A two year high school was built in 1907. In 1954, an elementary school was built, and another school was built in 1961. A gymnasium for the district was completed in 1965. In 1971 the high school now used was added to the gymnasium and expanded in 1974.

The Assembly of God Church was built in 1973. A new church building was erected and then dedicated in 1977. The construction of Interstate 70 brought businesses into Grain Valley and offered quick travel to urban areas. A large section of the Sni-A-Bar farm was sold in May 1988 by some of the Batmann's children. Steve Gildehaus purchased 1,200 acres of the land to build housing additions. Use of the land also went to some businesses. Shortly after the purchase of the land, Grain Valley annexed the area with Gildehaus' consent. The school district plans to build a new school in this area as well. In 1990, the population of the city had grown to 1,901, an increase of 43.3 percent since 1980.

This report was compiled by Dorothy Greene, January 1998 from the following articles: History of Stony Point, Erma Baumgartner (Doty) 1934, and City Was Formed From Small Towns, Joshua R. Fisher, The Blue Springs Examiner, August 14th, 1996. Special thanks to Paul Morgenroth, President of the Grain Valley Historical Society, for his help with this article.