



May 2009

# Wildwood Historical Society Newsletter

GROVER ● POND ● HOLLOW ● CENTAUR ● MELROSE ● FOX CREEK ● ORRVILLE ● ALLENTON ● WESTLAND ACRES ● KELPE ● MONARCH

## Meeting Calendar

3RD TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH

7:00 P.M.

BETHEL METHODIST CHURCH

17500 MANCHESTER RD.

### May 19

#### • Growing Up in Missouri in the 20s & 30s

A panel of WHS members

### June 16

#### • Field Trip: Route 66 State Park Museum Tour

Join us for a potluck picnic in  
the park at 5:30 P.M.

Tour begins at **6:30 P.M.**

### July 21

#### • VonGruben Family History in Wildwood

by David and Jill VonGruben

## Membership

Join the

Wildwood Historical Society

\$20 per year single

\$25 per year family

Make checks payable to:

Wildwood Historical Society

P.O. Box 125

Wildwood, MO 63040

## Wildwood Before Lewis & Clark: The Rest of the Story

by Jim Martin

A previous WHS newsletter article described the impact of James Mackay on the initial development of the Wildwood area in 1790's. His ability to convince the then Spanish government to allow him to establish the town of St. Andre (sometimes referred to as St. Andrews) at the western end of the area of Gumbo bottoms was the spark to immigration here.

Mackay's efforts were made possible through the decision of Spanish Lt. Governor Zenon Trudeau to encourage Americans living in Kentucky and Tennessee to move to the "New Spain." Concerned about the impact of hundreds of Americans who were coming down the Ohio and requesting permission to settle on the western side of the Mississippi, Trudeau decided to avoid the threat of an American invasion by openly courting the potential new citizens. In October of 1796 letters were included in the *Kentucky Gazette* and other mid-South newspapers touting the ability of FREE land from the Spanish government, and a land which was "free from chicanery and lawyers." For the thousands of poor Kentuckians who had lost their claims to land speculators, these advertisements were a dream come true.

Spain had given land grants to Americans in prior years, including such historic figures as Moses Austin who developed a lead mine near Valle Mines, but the grants were limited in size and the settlers were supposedly limited to CATHOLICS only! The decision of Trudeau and the Governor Carondelet to allow settlement by non-Catholics was tempered by a policy against open Protestant worship and the required promise that families raise their children in the Catholic faith. The shortage of rural churches made this requirement extremely difficult, and by the time Spain transferred the Louisiana territory to France in 1800, all but forgotten.

According to the later American land claim records, families were granted up to 600 arpents of land in the Wildwood area along the Missouri River in as early as February of 1797. Reading from west to east these included William Bellew (who held a claim far up the Wildhorse Creek valley), James, John, and Jesse Richardson, William Massey, and John Basye. Later in 1797 and early 1798 were recorded Spanish land grants to Alexander Courtney, William Bell, Peter Vaughn, James McDonald, John Bear, George McFall, Theophilus McKinnon and John Murphy. If these surnames and those of Henry, Colgin, Graham, Howell, Stewart, Hamilton (other Missouri River bottom settlers to Wildwood who arrived in 1798-99) appear very Scottish or Irish, it was no accident. For it was these nationalities, along with a few Welsh, Creoles, and a smattering of poor English, who were the then-current settlers of the Kentucky and Tennessee region. The waves of German immigrants to the Wildwood area would not begin in earnest until the early 1830's.

With the exception of Howell (Island) and perhaps Bellew (for whom a creek is named in Jefferson County), most of the family names listed above have been lost in local history. Further east in the Gumbo valley, but arriving at the same time, were immigrants including the Longs (Long Road), Richard Caulk (Caulk's Creek), and the Musick and Parke families (for whom roads were named in south St. Louis County). A speaker at our summer program series will explain the "Wildwood connection" to south St. Louis County and how James Mackay convinced the Longs, Musicks, Parkes and perhaps others to relocate to "the headwaters of the Gravois creek."

## **THE WILDWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NOW HAS A WEBSITE!**

[www.wildwoodhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.wildwoodhistoricalsociety.org)

The site should be 90% completed by May 20. A big thanks to Ben Bunch for designing this for us.

## *Officers*

**James Martin**, PRESIDENT

(636) 458-3306 - jfmartin1@sbcglobal.net

**Clarence Schaeg**, VICE PRESIDENT

(636) 458-3568 - clarpat1132@sbcglobal.net

**Joyce Mercer**, SECRETARY

(636) 227-0949 - jimercer@msn.com

**David VonGruben**, TREASURER

(636) 458-3098 - devgdevg@aol.com

**Lisa Kelpel**, ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE

(636) 458-2860 - kelpfamily@gmail.com

**Steve Wyatt**, ARCHIVIST

(636) 273-3744 - pswyatt@gmail.com

## *Trustees*

**Martha Bunch**

**Helen Gaehe**

**Jill VonGruben**

**Tom Kelpel**

## *Editor*

**Matthew Kelpel**

(636) 458-2860 - kelpfamily@gmail.com

# St. Louis County Watchman.

**February 1, 1883**

## **Loss of Lands in our County. Caused by the Washings of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers.**

It would be hard to estimate the damages done by the ever changing channels of the Missouri and a small part of the Mississippi Rivers. Within the past 12 years St. Louis County has lost thousands of acres of its best land, and many a farmer his entire farm, and the losses have not yet ended. Farms, which were the owners' pride a few years ago, are now the main channel of the Missouri. The cutting has been done at intervals, one of which begins at a point, about 2 miles above Howell's Ferry, and extends down to the ferry with a width of ½ mile on an average, and another one above the mouth of Fee Fee Creek, extending all the way down to St. Charles, about 3 miles in length. The lost land will measure about ¾ mile in width and three miles in length, or perhaps more.

The river has been gradually eating into the bank opposite St. Charles, and a sand bar has already formed on the St. Charles side, where the ferry boat is compelled to land below the St. Charles bridge.

The U. S. Government has made an appropriation for the improvement at this point. Work was pushed ahead until the waters of the Missouri became so low that boats could no longer carry rip-rap to the place where it was necessary to stop the cutting, and work was abandoned in December last. Should there be a rise of the river in spring, its strong current will carry away the rip-rap as fast as it is dumped in from the boats. The result is almost certain to be disastrous to the dykes on the St. Louis County side, and Sand Town will be a town of the past. If the dykes should go, the Eastern approach of the bridge will also be in great danger.

Cutting begins again at a point, where the Hall's Ferry Road intersects the river, and from there on it extends for at least 1½ miles long and ¼ mile wide. Then it begins again at the mouth of Cold Water Creek for a distance of 4 miles to the Missouri River, and with the assistance of the Mississippi, it continues cutting down to the City limits, for a distance of 5 miles in length and from ½ to 1 mile in width.

These tracts of land are the most productive in the State, and the outlook is that the cutting will never cease until the bluffs are reached, unless the U. S. Government takes proper measures to stop it.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

P.O. Box 125, Wildwood, MO 63040

*Society Newsletter*

*Wildwood Historical*