Platte County, Now in Political Spotlight, Has Colorful History

Home District of Late Francis Wilson and Judge Guy B. Park Has Played Important Part in State's Growth.

The spotlight of Missouri's interest now is focused on Platte county through the names of the late Sen. Francis M. Wilson and Judge Guy B. Park, recently selected Democratic nominee for the governorship of Missouri.

No county in Missouri has a more interesting history.

Virgin forests, grassy uplands, and Indian trails, such was Platte county 100 years ago. Pioneers coming in from eastern states, bringing with them the courage of martyrs and firmly built characters, wended their way into this virgin land and from such pioneers have sprung such men as the late Sen. Francis M. Wilson and Judge Park.

Indian trails traversing this unknown land have long since been replaced by an evolution of dirt roads, pikes, and ribbons of concrete. Platte county for many years on the western edge of civilization is rich in history, the records dating back to "before the war" days, when the earliest pioneers entered the land when it was opened for preemption in 1837 as part of the Platte Purchase.

However, evidence of prehistoric man and the residence of Indians have been well established in many localities. Mounds have been opened along the Missouri river bluffs and other places containing the bones and weapons of Indians, in some instances the bones were charred, giving evidence of a tribe that practiced cremation. Even as early as 1845 when some of the first mounds were opened, hugh white oak trees were felled, at least 100 years old, giving proof that a century had expired since burial took place.

Evidences of Old Race.

Stone walls near Parkville were excavated about fifty years ago, suggesting an earlier race than the Indians as the bricks were made in Egyptian style, well burned.

Geographically, Platte county is on the western edge of the state, bounded on the south and west by the tempermental "Missouri," which through the succeeding years has taken from and made Platte county soil. The Platte river, from which it derives its name, flows directly across it, emptying into the Missouri a few miles above Parkville.

A broad expanse of fertile soil borders the Platte on either side, following its course across the county, making the farmland highly adaptable to its productive qualities, and which was an attractive inducement to the pioneer farmers in the county. The alluvial deposits in this and the Missouri river valleys are said to equal those in the valley of the Nile.

Old Indian Reserve.

For sixteen years after Missouri was admitted to the union, the territory comprising northwest Missouri was an Indian reserve, granted them by the government, as they were gradually pushed westward, by the invasion of the white man. It was occupied by the Iowa, Sac and Fox tribes.

Clay county settlers, realizing the fertility of the land, began the agitation of extending the state boundary to the river. At a regimental muster on the Dale farm near Liberty in 1835 a movement was begun which resulted in the purchase of the territory, for which the sum of $7,500 was paid by the government to the three tribes.

The committee appointed at this meeting to petition congress were judge W. T. Wood, David R. Atchison, later United States senator, and Gen. Alexander W. Doniphan of Doniphan expedition fame. The treaty with the Indians was ratified in 1837 and negotiated by William Clark of the Lewis and Clark expeditionary forces. The new territory was divided into counties, one of which is Platte, two years after the ratification, but until then was attached to Clay county.

Fort Leavenworth, which was opened in 1927 by Captain Leavenworth of the 4th infantry, U. S. army, was influential in the making of Platte history. As yet steamboats were plying the river no further than Liberty Landing and Lexington, except for expedition parties, Fort Leavenworth therefore became dependent upon the inland for its provisions. Platte yet an Indian reserve, dependency was upon Clay, as a base of supplies for the fort. The Indian trails would not suffice for transportation, hence the government built a military road across the reserve to Barry, the last outpost of civilization in Clay county. Portions of the road are still in use, as it angles out through the hill lands to its termination. The road was built by labor of the soldiers and Clay settlers.

The first invasion into Platte county ten years later was by the way of the military road. The problem of fording the Platte and Missouri rivers confronted the road builders, but this was solved by operating ferry boats. Zadock Martin, an early Clay settler, was appointed to operate the ferry at both river crossings, the one crossing the Platte at the falls, which was later designated as "Falls of the Platte" and became the first county seat, later the name changed to Platte City. Indian trading posts were also established at the river crossings and at Barry. When this new land was opened to emigrants in 1837, Zadock also established a grist mill, one of the early necessities to the pioneer for grinding of his grain.

Old Town of Barry.

After the opening of the military road in 1828 mail was carried to Fort Leavenworth by horseback weekly, until 1831 it was conveyed by hack biweekly. The post at Barry was established in 1827 and named in honor of Postmaster General W. F. Barry. The mail was brought from Liberty Landing to Barry. The Platte and Clay county line runs directly through the hamlet of Barry at the present time.

This entire territory from the Missouri state line to the river had been forbidden the whites, while an Indian reservation, but some of the more adventurous nature and realizing the fertility of the soil, edged over the line and were established when the pre-emption laws were passed, in 1837. Expedition parties exploring the river were joined by trappers and traders, down river, who embarked at various points on the reserve, and small river settlements came into existence. One of these, a French Canadian by the name of Aloe, wintered at the mouth of a branch that empties into the Missouri river. The Indians named the branch "White Aloe," by which name it is known today and separates the village of Parkville from Park college campus.

One of the first river settlements was at Rialto, across from Fort Leavenworth. This became a rendezvous for soldiers as a place of recreation and vice, which was practiced to such an extent the settlers were dislodged by the government. Many of the early "squatters," both inland and on the river banks, were also evaded by federal authorities.

Settlers From East.

Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee sent sturdy and enterprising stock to populate this land of promise, bosomed in the valley of the Missouri river. The northern states also sent a few settlers. The emigrant trains with their precious cargo of humanity and their worldly possessions came into the new land, charged with courage and ambition. Clay, Howard and other counties also sent some of their earlier pioneers to establish homes on virgin soil.

By this time, 1837-38, the river had become navigable to some miles above Leavenworth, consequently steamboats brought some of the populace, who settled at navigable points, and the river front of Platte county became dotted with towns, dating back to steamboat and grist mills. Blacksmith shops and trading posts were the nucleus of small settlements inland, while the surplus production of the farmer found a ready market at the fort in supplying food for the cantonment station there.

Among the early settlers coming in 1838 was the family of John D. Murray, the maternal grandparents of the late Francis M. Wilson, who with other thrifty pioneers, brought with them their slaves, arts and trades. Many and skilled were the craftsmen among them. From the most learned the officers to wield the hand of law in an official county capacity were selected when the county was organized in 1839, the first meeting held March 11 the same year. Platte county continued to thrive and flourish under the influence of this southern stock, whose posterity continue to fill the seats of justice and halls of fame, ever standing to defend the democracy of the county.

Early Church.

The soil was found to be highly adaptable to the production of hemp, and in time became one of the largest hemp producing areas in the country. Through this enterprise the river towns prospered as shipping points. The buying and selling of slaves was also a great enterprise in this hemp producing area, where the labor of the black man is essential for its production.

Religion, too, had its influence, for these early pioneers were of righteous stock. The first church was erected in 1840, commonly known as "Flint Rock" of the Hard Shell Baptist faith. This church of logs stands today and is in a fair state of preservation. Other communities soon built churches and soon all denominations of the South were represented.

Another landmark still standing is the Half-Way House, erected in 1839, and served as a halting place for the weary traveler, traveling from the steamboat landing at Weston to the seat of justice at the Falls of the Platte. It boasted its wine cellar where a draught oftimes quenched the thirst of the wayfarer. The sub-cellar connected with the tavern yet bears the marks of slavery days. The huge rings imbedded in the thick rock walls, furnished security from rebellious slaves, while their masters bartered over their souls in this mart of the Far West.

Log schoolhouses were the halls of learning until 1848, when the Camden Point female academy was founded through the enterprise of Hon. William M. Kincade of that city. A school for young men was established at Platte City two years later by H. B. Todd and a female academy in 1857 in the same city. These prewar schools ceased to exist during the conflict, but at the close of the war Gaylord institute was set in operation by F. G. Gaylord at Platte City with 200 young women enrolled on its roster. Here it was that Judge Guy B. Parks has the distinction of being the only male to ever graduate as his mother after the regime of Professor Gaylord, became its president. The school was destroyed by fire in the late '90s. Here the Platte county belles received their learning in music, the arts and languages. Prior to becoming president, Mrs. Park was a music teacher in the institution.

Park College.

Park college was not founded until 1875, when a large stone hotel, which had gone into disuse, was used as the first classroom and dormitory. The college was founded by Col. George S. Park who also platted the town of Parkville in 1845. The stone hotel was a relic of the heyday of the town, when steamers tying at its docks brought a transient business demanding first class accommodations.

The year 1859 marked the era of prosperity for Platte county. Situated on the western borderland, adjacent to the broad plains, it became the supply base for western exploration parties and those seeking gold in California. Wagons, supplies and provisions were greatly in demand for the overland trains. The demand for provisions at the fort had also increased for the "Army of the West" in which Platte men under Capt. William S. Murphy participated. The entire Missouri expedition was under Col. Alexander Doniphan. Emigrants returning from California with their nuggets of gold augmented the tide of prosperity. The agitation of railroads was also an asset in the development of the county. The first branch of the Atchison & St. Joe railroad was completed in 1860 and operated between Weston and St. Joseph. Slaves and lands were bringing fabulous prices and business flourished on every hand.

Courthouse Burned.

The beginning of the Civil war was the initial fall of prosperity, and by 1861 anarchy prevailed, business places closed, prosperity disappeared, and crime prevailed on every hand. A regiment was raised by Col. J. H. Winston and Platte county was the scene of many skirmishes and conflicts. The first courthouse was burned, also many homes.

The News-Press also had its day of fluctuation in the new region. Here again we see the influence of the Park family in Platte history, as the father of Judge Park was editor of the Reveille, in Platte City, for many years. Papers were also printed at Weston and Parkville in the early day, and have continued to be a great influence as community builders. The paper owned by Thomas Park merged with the Landmark at Platte City in 1871 and the weekly publication of Platte City still bears that name. The Platte County Gazette at Parkville has been owned and published by J. P. Tucker for almost fifty years.

The abolition of slavery ceased the cultivation of hemp, as only the black man could withstand the labor required for its production. Tobacco was also one of the first Platte county crops. It found its way into the eastern market, as did the hemp, via the steamboats down the muddy Missouri.

The advent of the railroad, traversing the county, brought many changes. The shipping facilities were influential in stock raising, which turned the minds of the farmers to the growing of grass and grain, and which pursuits are followed largely today, as also fruit growing and truck growing.

Growing Tobacco Again.

The last fifteen or twenty years have found the cycle of time revolving again to the growing of tobacco, which has increased year by year, and is now the source of great revenue for the Platte county grower.

The struggles for supremacy over a virgin land, by the forbears of Platte county, men and women so constituted that a new land was an adventure, where romance still lingered, who have seen the tide of prosperity and adversity ebb and flow, have chiseled in the pages of Platte county history memories of the past, inspired work for the present and hope for the future.

Two Favored Sons.

All Platte county knew Francis Wilson as Senator Wilson. The title stuck after his service for many years in the state senate. He also served in the house of representatives, being elected from his home district in Platte City, where he was born and reared. His start in politics came at an early age when he was elected prosecutor of Platte county.

Senator Wilson served his party for many years and in other ways than as representative and senator. He was United States district attorney for the Western district of Missouri from 1913 to 1920.

Judge Guy B. Park, who received the appointment as Democratic nominee for the governorship after the death of Senator Wilson, also is a favored son of Platte county. He also was born in Platte City. He is the only man ever to have been graduated from Gaylord institute, a Platte City girl's school of which his mother was president. He has served as city attorney in Platte City and as prosecuting attorney for Platte county and as circuit judge. Judge Park's roots are embedded as firmly in the history of Platte county as were those of the late Senator Wilson.

'WHAT-A-MAN' HUDSON EAGER TO WED AGAIN

ALBUQUERQUE, N. M., Oct. 29.—(U.P.)—Guy (What a Man) Hudson announced here Saturday he was ready to get married "right now" if the Mexican divorce obtained by his wife, Mrs. Minnie (Ma) Kennedy Hudson was legal. Hudson would not reveal the name of the girl he might marry. He demanded to know why he should continue to live alone.

LIGHT FOCUSED ON WINDOW TO KILL BUGS

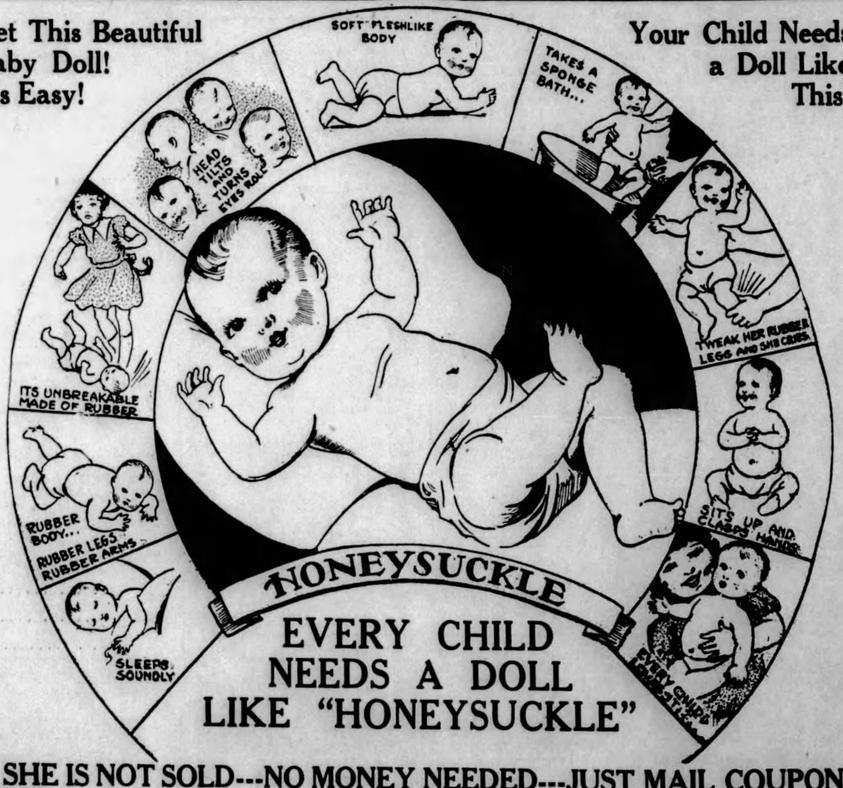
Bugs that have entered the vacation tent during the day can be killed after dark by turning the auto lights against the window from the outside or by placing a lamp so that it shines on the window from the outside, says Popular Mechanics magazine. This will cause the bugs to fly against the lighted window where they can be killed.

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