A Platte County Landmark Is Gradually Passing From Scene

The "Half-Way House," Between Platte City and Weston, Is Rich in Historical Lore—Built in 1840, It Was the Scene of Slave Sales.

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(By The Star's Own Service.)

PLATTE CITY, MO., May 13.—Three miles west of here on a new farm-to-market road stands an old house that time gradually is taking from the Platte County landscape. This old place is called the "Half-Way House," and stands midway between this town and Weston.

The old mansion, for it really was a pretentious building, was constructed about 1840, the exact date being unknown, and was used as a tavern. The building stands on high basement wall of stone on a sloping hillside north of the highway. Walnut joists of immense size were used to support the structure, and all lumber used in the construction was hand hewn.

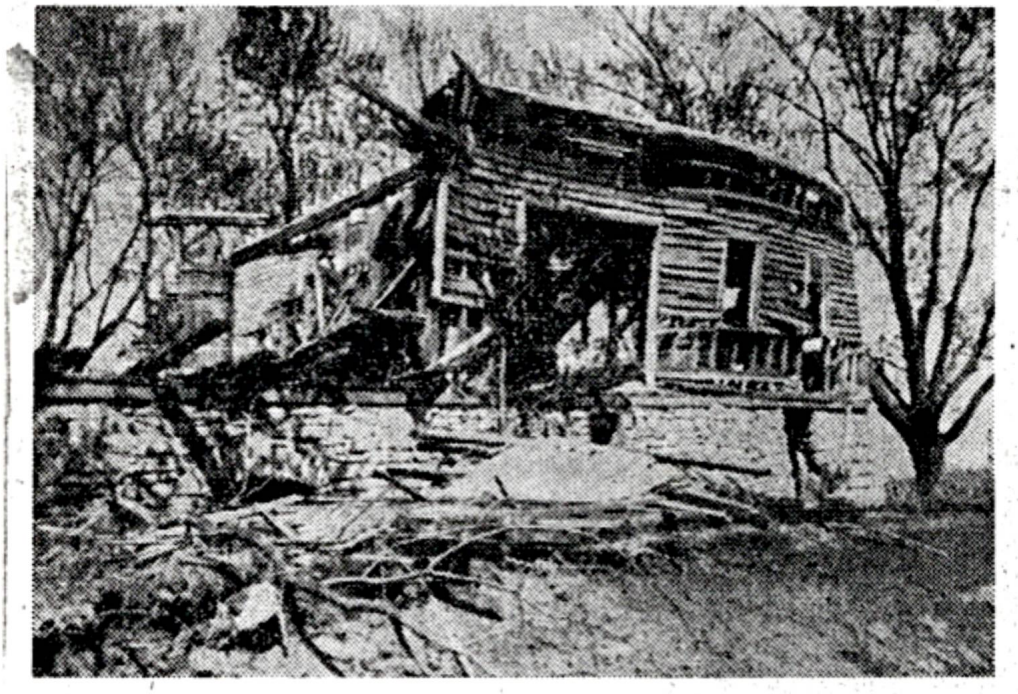
Where Slaves Were Sold.

A large central hall with two commodious rooms on each side made up dwindled and soon there was very little revenue from the toll pike.

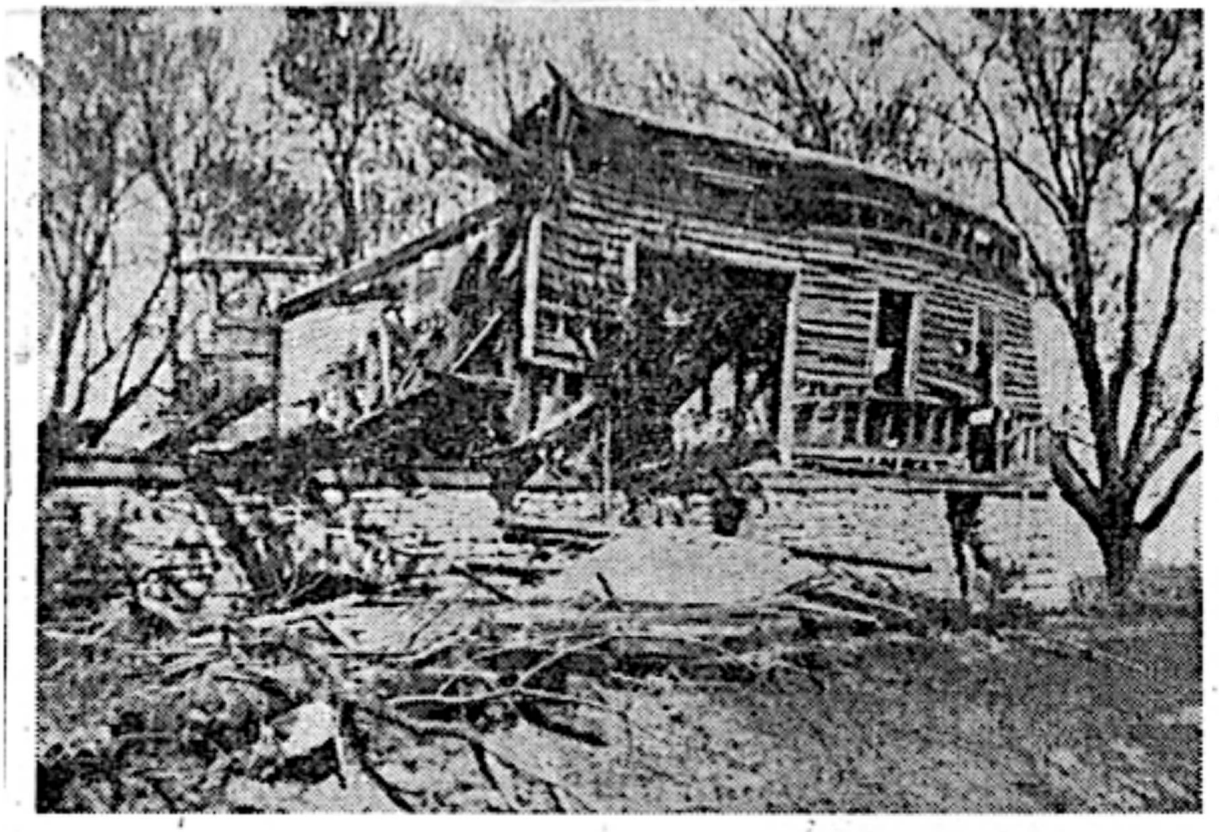
Nightly in the old mansion on the side of the hill gala parties were held—women dressed in the height of fashion leaned on the arms of portly gentlemen. At that time John Floersch was the tavern-keeper. The ownership of the tavern by Floersch ended October 20, 1851, when, accompanied by his three sons and another man, they went to the home of Hall E. Wilkerson, his neighbor, to release by force some livestock which Wilkerson had impounded for trespass. During the course of the argument which ensued, Wilkerson was killed by Floersch.

A Slaying Is Recalled.

Mr. Wilkerson, who was the first clerk of Platte County, had represented his district in the legislature in 1848, was a major in the state militia, and was a man highly respected. Due to the popularity of Mr. Wilkerson, Floersch, on a change of venue to Clay County, was tried, convicted and sentenced to twenty-five years in



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the first floor. Above these rooms and reached by a narrow staircase were other smaller rooms. Along the entire southern front of the building formerly extended a porch, and from this porch slaves were sold at auction. In the basement was the kitchen and dining room. Stones from the huge fireplace now are used by the Boy Scouts in Weston for a fireplace.

The building was erected shortly after the toll road between Platte City and Weston was opened. Over this pike was freighted heavy inland traffic from the landing at Weston and for the transport of supplies to the army post at Ft. Leavenworth. The gate was tended and the tolls were collected by Mrs. Peyton Randolph Waggener, with the assistance of her son, Bailie P. Waggener, who later was destined to play an important part in legal and political circles in Kansas.

During the time the traffic over the pike was at its crest, the "Half-Way House" enjoyed a big business, but as the railroads began to pierce the county the overland road traffic prison. Floersch only lived a year after he went to prison, and the property was sold to satisfy the claims of attorneys who had defended him.

One of the most interesting things which has raised more theories and started more investigations was the large number of big iron rings in the basement of the house. It was a common practice in those days for everyone in that section of the county to have many slaves, and the general opinion is that these rings were used to imprison slaves who were unruly and who were going to be flogged. Up to a few years ago, the favorite pastime for residents of this community was to dig around the old building for "buried treasure." There is hardly a square foot of ground around the building or in the basement that hasn't been probed with a spade in efforts to find something of value.

But the only thing of value that remains at the old "Half-Way House" are the memories of nearly a century ago, and the authentic story of the days of the coaches-and-four never will be told.