

A HISTORIC INVENTORY
of
BUCHANAN COUNTY MISSOURI

SPRING 1981

AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE HISTORICAL, ARCHITECTURAL, ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY
OF RURAL BUCHANAN COUNTY, MISSOURI: 1981.

The Platte Purchase in Northwest Missouri was forbidden ground to white men until 1837. Although the government had taken measures to prevent settlement of the area adventurous pioneers had pitched their tents and constructed crude shelters, as early as 1834-1835, along the border of the east and south parts of the county. Joseph Robidoux had been at his trading post on the Missouri River for over a decade.

Those familiar with the early settlement of any Missouri county, are aware that the first settlements were made along the various streams and rivers or in and near the timber which grew in the vicinity. Buchanan County fits this pattern with the settlement at Blacksnake Creek, Sparta, Matney's Mill and other, hard to locate, settlements sites of yesteryear.

Buchanan County is bounded on the north by Andrew County, on the east by DeKalb and Clinton County, on the south by Platte County and on the west by the Missouri River. It contains about four hundred square miles of undulating prairies and about fifty square miles of river lowland. At varying distances from the Missouri River rises an irregular line of bluffs which are covered with a luxuriant growth of hardwood trees.

Besides the Missouri and Platte Rivers there are a number of lakes in the County which afford water sports to the residents. The principal water body is Lake Contrary located southwest of the City of St. Joseph. However, Lewis and Clark State Park, Horseshoe Lake, Bean Lake and many smaller spots offer ample opportunity for the residents to fish and carry on water sports.

The early settlers to Buchanan County tended to immigrate from the older settled sections of Missouri and from Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee giving the County a very pro-Confederate stance during the Civil War. After the war a distinct influx of German, Polish and Swiss immigrants gave the county and the City of St. Joseph the ethnic diversity associated with late 19th Century urban development.

The county is divided into twelve civil townships: Platte, Jackson, Crawford, Bloomington, Rush, Wayne, Center, Agency, Tremont, Marion, Washington and Lake. Because the City of St. Joseph is a large area and branches out into several townships it was decided to exclude from this survey, any Architectural, Archaeological or Historical sites located within its boundary. This, therefore, is a survey of rural Buchanan County.

The historic inventory of Buchanan County was conducted during the fall of 1980 and spring of 1981. In attempting to locate the various sites, buildings, and objects local resource persons were contacted in each township. Nancy Sandehn, Box 43, St. Joseph, MO 64501 served as the local resource person and nominated many of the historical sites.

Another source of obtaining site and architectural locations in the county was by using the windshield technique. This was extremely useful in discovering agricultural and folk house styles which are considered common place by the people who are surrounded by them everyday. Robert Bray of the State Archaeological Survey office served as the archaeological resource person.

In surveying the county a great deal of insight into the nature of the development of the area became obvious. Detailing a complete Historic Preservation plan for the County would be impossible under the limited funding provided for in this project. However, general observations and a general guide for future planning can be provided.

If past trends continue, the urban population of the State will continue to increase more rapidly than will the rural population. Although St. Joseph makes up a major portion of the population of Buchanan County, the process of rural-urban migration likely will continue because of the excess of rural youth reaching working age over the employment opportunities made available on the farms of Missouri. Further decrease in the number of farms and farm workers as mechanization proceeds will provide additional numbers of rural migrants to cities within and outside the State. The rate of this migration will depend on the maintenance of all employment and on the development of industry in the cities of Missouri and nearby States.

There is movement away from farms of entire farm operator families which are not being replaced. Evidence of this movement lies in the fact that the number of farms declined in the last decade, accounting for the loss of approximately 292 farms in that time period.

All of the towns in Buchanan County outside of St. Joseph are very small and the people living there earn their livelihood by providing services to the farmers. Because of the decline in the farmers and other factors, the people in the small town find greater advantages in moving to the city. Many of these small towns are inhabited by older retired people. When they die no one will replace them because of the migration of the younger people to the cities.

The task of alerting the county to the significance of their architectural and historical sites is omnibus. After completing the initial survey a public forum should be held which would address the issue of the style and type of architecture in the County.

The survey indicated there is a wealth of Queen Anne architectural styles in the area. However, there are several outstanding examples of the "I" Folk house, the Italianate, the Rural Gothic, Federal, Greek Revival, Shingle and Bungalow architectural styles. There are several areas which possess the possibility of being developed as Historic districts. Numerous sites, objects and materials exist which portray the agricultural nature of the county.

In attempting to evaluate the significance of the inventory in each township, the resources and advisory group looked at each nomination and inventory sheet. The historical and architectural sites are separated from the archaeological sites and they have separate codes and numbering systems.

The inventory definitely indicates several sites that are worthy of nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The primary project for the county for the next year should be a public forum to present the inventory findings to the community. The next step should be the nomination of the following properties to the National Register:

1. The Fenton House, Inventory #116, Nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in the Fall of 1980.
2. The Pleasant Ridge School, Inventory # 69, Nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in the fall of 1980.
3. The St. Joseph Waterworks, Inventory #5, Nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in the spring of 1981.
4. The Boyd House, Inventory #131.
5. Allison House, Inventory #134.
6. The Campbell House, Inventory #55
7. The formation of a Historic District in Rushville and nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

The goal of this project has been to identify and preserve the important historical and architectural sites in Buchanan County. It is hoped in the future that the concerned citizens of the County will develop and implement a process for effective use of this historic resource information and proceed with a historic preservation plan for their County. The implementation and identification process outlined above is a continuous process and should not be closed with this presentation. The scope of historical, archaeological and architectural resources in Buchanan County is broad enough to allow all sectors of society to participate. From this conceptual basis an achievable historic preservation plan can be established.

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