

A HISTORIC INVENTORY
OF
HARRISON COUNTY MISSOURI

FALL 1980

HISTORIC PRESERVATION FOR HARRISON COUNTY.

The historic inventory of Harrison County was conducted during the spring of 1980. In attempting to locate the various sites, buildings, and objects local resource persons were contacted in each township. The Harrison County Historical Society served as the local resource agent and nominated many of the historical sites. Mrs. Maudine Beenum, of New Hampton was of valuable assistance in surveying White Oak Township. Mr. O.A. Kelim of Bethany, Missouri was of valuable assistance in surveying the area and is listed as the local contact person on the inventory sheets.

Another source of obtaining site and architectural locations in the county was by using the windshield technique. This was extremely useful in discovering agricultural architecture 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.

This county which is being analyzed had a total population of 16,525 in 1940, which declined to 14,107 in 1950, and further decline to 10,257 in 1970 and even less in the preliminary totals released for the 1980 census. This shows that the county has had a steady decline in population during the past four decades.

There are fifteen towns or (hamlets and small villages) and one city which is the county seat. This city is Bethany and it had 2,914 persons residing there in 1970. It is considered urban by the United States Census even if it really isn't a city. Most of the small towns are dwindling in size. Bethany's improvement, of a sewage disposal plant, improved the city tremendously and perhaps influenced the county in some way. Bethany is also the major trading center in the county. The new Interstate #35, runs up the center of Harrison County, not more than one mile from the city of Bethany. This has had an effect on the city in that people tend to migrate more rapidly and tend to trade in other cities. A discussion of the migration will follow in the succeeding pages. There are two other major highways which run across the state in two different directions, which also junction at Bethany having the same effect on the city. There are no industrial sites, cultural attractions, tourist attractions, etc. located in Harrison County. According to the survey, the greatest attraction that anyone has mentioned is the densely forest covered land in the northern part of the county near or around the town of Hatfield. Large game such as deer, as well as small game, attract a good many hunters during the winter months. The largest and only tributary in Harrison is the Thompson river which runs north and south along the east edge of the county. It is not large enough to channel a boat for industrial purposes, only small craft. The river is suitable for fishing of small game fish; however, this does not attract many persons to the county.

People have moved from this area to the west coast, the Great Lakes Industrial area, Atlantic Sea Board, and the Gulf Coast. This trend is a result of depression, war, and peacetime prosperity. This fairly longtime trend might be substantially altered by atomic or bacteriological warfare. To date, however, there is no evidence of the effects of such fears on the regional distribution

of population of the United States. There is an anticipated gain in population of Missouri, however, Harrison County will continue to decline due to migration to large cities and other areas.

If past trends continue, the urban population of the State will continue to increase more rapidly than will the rural population, which makes up a major portion of Harrison 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 11% in the last decade, accounting for the loss of approximately 272 farms in that time period.

All of the towns in Harrison County 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, Shingle and Bungalow architectural styles. There are several areas which possess the possibility of being developed as historical districts. These would include the downtown area of Bethany and Ridgeway; the communities of Cainsville and New Hampton and the area around Blythedale. 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 resource 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 Slatten Thousand Acres east of Bethany.
2. The Koch or J.P. Hamilton House in Bethany.
3. The Skolaus Funeral Home in Cainsville.
4. The formation of a Historic District in New Hampton and nomination to the National Register.
5. The formation of a Historic District in Bethany and nomination to the National Register.

The goal of this project has been to identify and preserve the important historical and architectural sites in Harrison 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 Harrison 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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HISTORY OF HARRISON COUNTY

A county of fertile Grand River basin soil in the undulating plans of North Central Missouri, Harrison is one of 9 counties forming the state border with Iowa. Twenty-sixth in size of Missouri's 114 counties and second largest on the border, it was organized in 1845 and named for Missouri Congressman Albert G. Harrison. Although it is now 720 square miles it did not achieve it's present size until the U.S. Supreme Court established the Missouri-Iowa boundary in 1851. Although the region was ceded by Iowa, Sac, and Fox tribes in 1824, the county was roamed by Indians into the 1840's. The Great Indian Trail ran east to northwest in the county. Surveyed land was entered for sale in 1842. Originally about three-fourths of the land of Harrison County was prairie and one-fourth timber. Surface soil is mostly a black loam with a clay subsoil. The principal stone is of the limestone variety. The soil, climate, and topography are especially adapted to the production of grain, hay and stock in abundance.

Early settlers from Ohio, Illinois, other parts of Missouri and the east, came in the late 1830's. Later a number of Bohemians settled in the county. Among county towns are Eagleville; Ridgeway, once a contestant for the county seat; Cainsville, once a coal mining town; Mount Moriah; New Hampton; Martinsville; Gilman City; Blythedale; and Melbourne. There are 20 townships in the county.

Bethany, the seat of Justice, first called Dallas, was laid out in 1845, at the direction of John Allen, County Seat Commissioner, later member of 1861 State Convention. Bethany is prototype of the town in the famed 1883 novel "The Story of a Country Town" by Edgar (Ed) W. Howe (1853-1937), founder of the Atchison, Kansas Globe. His father, Henry Howe, was a minister and editor in Bethany when Ed was a boy.

In the war between the states, Harrison County sent a number of Federal troops. The first railroad, a branch of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy, reached Bethany in the 1880's. The town grew as a trading and shipping point. Fair grounds there date from the early 1900's. Union General Benjamin Mayberry Prentiss practiced law in Bethany. Joseph H. Burrows (1840-1918), who introduced the first bill (1881) to cut postage from 3¢ to 2¢ and named John J. Pershing for West Point appointment, was a business man and minister in Cainsville.

The growth in assessed property valuation and taxes collected has been constant since the first year of Harrison County. At the October term of court in 1845, John W. Brown, sheriff and ex-officio collector, settled with the court for the 1845 tax books. Out of the amount on the tax books for the year totaling \$296.76, he remitted \$249.38 to the county treasurer. Delinquent taxes and commissions accounted for the remaining \$47.38. By 1887, the assessed value had increased to \$5,234,742.00. In 1975, the assessed valuation reached \$38,192,386.00.

By 1887, the county had 12,283 horses, 1,331 mules, 51 asses and jennets, 39,158 cattle, 41,369 hogs and 25,862 sheep. By 1975, the cattle population had risen to 98,500 and the number of hogs had reached 63,000. Harrison County is among the top counties in Northwest Missouri although far behind Nodaway County which has 136,000 hogs to rank first in the state.

The county also ranks high among area counties in grain and hay production. The most recent statistics show the county harvested 48,200 acres of corn which averaged 55 bushels per acre; 3,400 acres of wheat which produced 27.8 bushels per acre; 37,400 acres of soybeans which averaged 45 bushels per acre; and 59,600 acres of hay with a 1.8 tons yield per acre.

The income for the farm community of the county reached \$38,898,000.00 last year, which exceeded the previous year's income by over \$6,000,000.00. The income included cash returns from the sale of crops, livestock and other commodities, government payments, and the value of products consumed on the farm.

By 1888, the population of the county had increased from 2,447 in 1850 to 20,304. The population of the county reached a peak of 24,398 in 1900. A steady decline since that year has brought the current population near 10,000. The decline has been due to the reduction in the number of farms, which also grew in size, the migration of youth to industrial centers where more job opportunities are available, and the trend toward small families. Since the post-Vietnam depression, there has been a noticeable migration back to smaller towns, although many of the workers still drive to jobs in urban centers.

Agriculture has been Harrison County's largest industry from the days of early settlers to the present day. Farms have grown larger and crop yields have increased steadily providing an economic base for the Northwest Missouri County.

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