

News from Old Mines

The Newsletter of the Old Mines French Project

No. 6, Spring 2017

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FROM THE EDITOR

When I started this project three years ago, one of the first tasks was to create a Facebook page to facilitate communication and share information. In the early stages, I thought I would be happy to have any response at all, and was delighted to quickly obtain nearly 200 “Likes.” Now (as of late May 2017) there are more than 900, which I hope attests to the level of interest in the project and the topics it covers. Seeing the comments on the Facebook page helps inspire me to continue with the project, and explore new topics.

Thank you for your interest! Merci!

Will Thompson

La Fête à Renault, May 2017

The Brigade a Renault held its 32nd annual May rendezvous on the grounds of St. Joachim Catholic Church in Old Mines on the 20th and 21st. Although those camping out might not have appreciated the torrential rains on Friday and Saturday night, fortunately the weather cooperated on Saturday afternoon, allowing a large number of visitors to come and enjoy the encampment. Along with the hardy souls who brave the elements and camp out over the weekend, the event also features musical performances, traders, rifle and archery shoots, and (perhaps most popularly) bread straight from the traditional-style ovens on the site. The rendezvous is one of two held at this location every year, the other being in February, and is part of a network of similar events throughout the region. More photos on p. 3.



Old Mines History: The Mineral Point Cyclone of 1917

“Big Cyclone! Mineral Point Just Got Blowed Away!”

Par Kent Beaulne dit Bone

On Decoration Day, Wednesday, May 30th, 1917 large sections of Washington County Missouri were devastated by storms. That date was early on ingrained in my brain, making it easier years later to find newspaper accounts of the disaster. I grew up hearing stories about the Cyclone that blew away Mineral Point from Grandpa Possum Bone, Uncle Luke, Uncle Dink, aunt Viola Eckhoff, and Aunt Lucille Portell. Their grandparents Gus Bone and his wife Louise Degonia were killed when their house exploded. Decoration Day is what folks used to call Memorial Day. The custom of decorating the graves of veterans with flowers began during the American Civil War (1861-1865). After WWI (1914-1918) the day evolved to honor veterans of all American wars. It was always observed on the 30th of May, no matter what day of the week it fell on. The name gradually changed to Memorial Day and in 1971 it was permanently fixed to the last Monday of May by an act of Congress. This was part of a plan to have more three-day weekends, which was good for tourism and fit better the work schedule of modern business. Even so, the term “Decoration Day” persisted with the older generation, whose grandfathers had fought in the Civil War.

Mineral Point, part of the old Cole Plantation, was one of those towns like Vineland, Blackwell, Tiff, Cadet, Hopewell, and Irondale, that grew up along the Iron Mountain Rail Road tracks, which was the Interstate highway of the day. In those days everyone took the train, as the roads weren't very good, and not everyone had horses or wagons. At the time there was a picnic and ceremony on Decoration Day at the Hopewell Cemetery, which lies high on a hill. It seems to have been a huge event for its time. Hopewell being only four miles away by train, most of the residents of the Point and other towns had gone to the picnic there. The Hopewell church and cemetery continue to be well maintained and there may still be a ceremony on Memorial Day, albeit much smaller. The Hopewell folks could enlighten us better on this.

The Stories. My story tellers were very young when this happened, or heard tales about it from those who were there. One story often told, was that while returning with passengers from the Hopewell picnic, the locomotive engineer saw the cyclone ahead, slowed his engine to a stop, then backed up to avoid the impending disaster. The folks on the train watched in horror as their town got blown away. As the story goes, the steel rails of the tracks were pulled loose from the ties by the power of the cyclone. This turned out to be an exaggeration, but the tracks were pushed 16 inches out of line. Possum and Uncle Dink said that lots of folks would have been killed if they hadn't gone to that picnic. I always wondered why Gus and Louise Bone stayed home that day in 1917. Gus was an old Confederate soldier, so maybe he had no love for American (Union) Memorial observances.

Grandma Torie Bone was a young girl at the time, living in a log house on what is now Bottom Diggins Road. She was sitting out in the yard when she saw her tante Belle Cabine coming down the lane as fast as she could, pulling her son little Cabine behind. She was saying over and over in French, “viens donc Cabine, viens donc toè. “Come on Cabine, come on, you!” She was terribly rattled. “She was a mess”. Grandma Torie asks, what's wrong tante Bell? She didn't even stop, she just kept saying “Big Cyclone, Mineral Point just got blown away”, as she headed down the lane.

Cousin Harold Eckhoff; “A two by four had come through the walls of grandpa Gus Bone's house, and went right through him. Grandma Louise died later from injuries. Aunt Lucile and mom (Viola) were in that house at the time.” Another story Harold told me; “There was a traveling preacher in town that day. He had set up on the street, and was preaching real loud, as they often did in those days. My uncles and some other boys began harassing him and throwing rocks. They practically ran him out of town. He cursed them with a threat of ‘Before this day is over, destruction will come down upon your town’, a very Old Testament sounding condemnation.”

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Kent Beaulne, continued from p. 2

Aunt Lucille-Toug said that when they heard it coming, her grandparents put her behind a dresser that was set caddy-corner, in a corner of the house. After it passed, she crawled out from under that dresser, to find most of the house gone. Her grandpa Gus was dead, and grandma Louise was badly injured.

My dad, Duddy Bone, used to point out the old YMCA building on the east side of DeSoto, saying that was where they brought the injured from Mineral Point. I've looked for a cornerstone on that building to see when it was built, but have failed to find it yet.

Another story I learned quite by accident in 2007, at a restaurant in Soulard, where I met Buddy Walton "Hairdresser to the stars". When he told me he grew up in Mineral Point, I asked if he had heard anything about the 1917 cyclone. He said his grandparents were killed that day and proceeded to tell me a story. "A boy was standing in a doorway. He was told to get out of that doorway or he would get killed. He didn't listen to them, and a board went right through him".

Mrs. Mandy Eckhoff who was a young girl in 1917, was one of those who hadn't gone to the Hopewell picnic, but survived. She remembered her town being blown away.

After this story was first published in the I-J in 2001, I received the following from Pat Weeks of Danna Point CA. "I had no idea of the scope of destruction to the mid-west. My great grandmother, Isabelle Rush Bridge, lost her home on the ridge overlooking Mineral Point. Well, let's see; cross the tracks going toward pond Creek. I believe the stone building was also referred to as the icehouse. At that first road, take it to the right and up the ridge. That is where Belle's house was located. I have a lovely picture of this house which was published in some architectural magazine of the time. The house was built by my grandfather Clarence Rush, probably about 1904. In the newspaper accounts of the cyclone, Belle was the one who 'suffered injuries to the lower limbs'. After the cyclone, Belle and husband Harry Bridge moved to Ironton into one of Philip Rush's taverns directly across from the Ironton train Depot."

Although memories become faded, and stories change over time, they can be a good starting point for doing research. It turns out most of the oral histories about the cyclone are backed-up with historical documents of the time.

More photos from the Fête à Renault, May 2017



From the Weekly-Independent, Potosi Missouri, Thursday, May 31, 1917
Cyclone Passes Through County, Killing Many
Town of Mineral Point Completely Destroyed-Seven Dead and Many Injured
Loss About \$200,000 In County-Crops and Orchards Greatly Damaged-Live Stock Loss Great

On Wednesday afternoon, a cyclone passed through Washington County, leaving many dead, and injured, and wrecking homes, business, fences, orchards, and crops. The greatest damage was done at Mineral Point, while property was destroyed in Harmony, Walton, and Kingston townships.

The storm entered this county at the southeast corner, and was about three-eighths of a mile wide, travelling in a northeast direction. Papers from Mineral Point were found in O'Fallon, IL and East St Louis, seventy-five miles distance. At Eye, nine miles west of Potosi, losses are reported as follows; Luther Sparks store house, and stock of merchandise; residence, and barns of C. H. Downard occupied by Aaron Trout; houses, and barns occupied by Wm. Allen, Geo. Allen, Richard Welker, and W. J. Jinkerson, Curtis Allen each.

The cyclone passed one and one-half miles south of Potosi, damaging the farm property of Andrew Weber, George Weber, Wm. Riehl, Jas. Dallen, and Dr. L. T. Hall, to a considerable amount. A log cabin on the Russel land occupied by Oscar Puckett, and family was blown away. The family was at home, but no one was injured. The timber loss along the entire path of the storm was very great. Large trees were twisted, and blown down.

At Mineral Point the entire town was destroyed. Below is given a list of the dead and injured, and the property destroyed. Two coaches on the Potosi branch, and one boxcar standing on the track at Mineral Point were blown over. Frank Richardson, and Charles Rush were in the coaches at the time. Rush escaped without injury, but Mr. Richardson had two ribs broken, and was badly bruised. Engineer Wm. N. Woods, and Fireman John H. Swift were on the engine, and sustained bruises. The engine held the track. The railroad track, one-fourth mile south of the Mineral Point station was curved 16 inches out of line.

Passenger train No. 22 north bound, carrying 500 passengers stopped ½ mile south of the station by an automatic block signal put in operation by the wind. The passengers watched the cyclone destroy the town of Mineral Point from the car windows. As soon as the wind abated sufficiently, conductor Jno. E. Gregg of St Louis led men and women from the train, and assisted in the rescue work, amid a driving rain, and hailstorm. Mr. Gregg after an hour's strenuous work in removing timbers from over the storm victims, placed 18 of the injured on his train and rushed them to the YMCA building in DeSoto, where they are being cared for. It is estimated that more than 200 of the passengers on No. 22 were residents of Mineral Point, and Potosi, and were returning home from Hopewell, 4 miles south of Mineral Point, where they had been to attend the annual Memorial Exercises that day. This accounts for the small number of deaths, and injuries.

There were several miraculous escapes made. One was the escape of Mr. H. S. Bowler, who clung to the side of a coal bin at the pump house during the storm, and sustained no injuries, while John Bone, the pumper, was picked up by the wind, and blown clear over the pump house, sustaining serious injuries. Mr. Wm A. Boddecke, President of the Point Milling & Manufacturing Co. has announced that the Tiff mill will be re-built after an adjustment with the insurance companies. This was good news to the people of Mineral Point, and the surrounding country, as many families there depend entirely upon the mill for support.

RELIEF WORK BEGUN; Immediately after the cyclone had passed, every available conveyance in Potosi was called into service, and left for scenes of the wreck. In order to reach Mineral Point it was necessary to cut a number of fallen trees from the road. Thursday morning a Relief Committee was appointed by Sheriff L. W. Casey, at Mineral Point, consisting of Rev. John T Self, Hugh L. White, and Henry C. Bell. A census was taken of the town, and assistance solicited by this committee. \$200.00 was raised before noon. In Potosi a meeting was called by the Mayor, J. W. Settle, for 2 o'clock p.m. Thursday, at which meeting, committees were appointed as follows; Finance; John F. Evans, Jas. A. Sheilds, H. L. White, O. L. Loomis, and Wm. Casey. Relief; Henry C. Bell, John T. Self, and John Maclay, of Potosi, and W. A. Boddecke, L. D. Bone, and H. S. Bowler, of Mineral Point. Mayor Settle is an ex-officio member of both committees. Both Committees organized at once, and have been actively at work soliciting funds, and relieving the distressed.

Thursday evening, Geo. W. Simmons, a Missouri director, and Chas. M. Hubbard, agent of the American Red Cross of St Louis, reached Potosi, and entered into the relief work with the local committee, and through their efforts, two trained nurses, and a large supply of groceries, and clothing of every description reached Mineral Point Friday evening. Saturday morning the work of distributing the supplies to the needy was begun, and about two hundred people were relieved.

Masonic Cemetery, Blackwell

On Highway CC, just a couple of miles from its junction with Highway 21, one finds the Masonic Cemetery at Blackwell. There are many French names to be found in the cemetery, some of which be seen below. The cemetery was established in 1908, and continues to be well. A list of those buried in the cemetery (and in others in Washington County) can be found at: <http://washington.mogenweb.org/cemetery/wccema.html>.



The Blackwell Masonic cemetery (above) and the impressive gateway to the cemetery (right). The inscriptions on each side of the gateway indicate that the land for the cemetery was donated by Judge T. Higginbotham, and list the members of the building committee, and details about the lodge in Blackwell.



FEATURED WEBSITE:
Washington County Place Names

http://shsmo.org/manuscripts/ramsay/ramsay_washington.html

The State Historical Society of Missouri website is an invaluable source of information, not surprisingly, about various aspects of the history of Washington County and its mining communities.

One of the more intriguing links on the site is to a project conducted over the course of nearly two decades in the first half of the 20th century conducted by Robert L. Ramsay, a University of Missouri English professor, and his students to document the origins of Missouri place names. This extensive and well-documented endeavor resulted in a fascinating tool for anyone looking into how places came to be known as they are. Elsewhere in this issue of the newsletter you will see one of these names “Arnault Branch,” discussed further.

Visit the site to see the hundreds of place names in Washington County that have been included in this project.

Right: A trip to Old Mines is simply not complete without a visit to the old St. Joachim Catholic Church cemetery. One of three cemeteries associated with the church, its most remarkable feature is undoubtedly the high concentration of iron crosses used to mark graves.

A walk through the cemetery evokes a past that the Old Mines French project hopes to keep alive. A trip to the cemetery also provides one with a beautiful view of the church itself.



Upcoming Events

June 3-4: [Fort de Chartres Rendezvous](#)

June 10: [Ste. Genevieve French Heritage Festival](#)

July 22: [Friends of the Fort Summer Ball, Prairie du Rocher](#)

August 12-13: [Jour de Fête, Ste. Genevieve](#)

August 26: [Louis Bolduc Days, Bolduc House, Ste. Genevieve](#)

September 10, [St. Joachim Annual Fall Festival](#)

September 23: [Ste. Genevieve History Conference](#)

October 1: [Annual Fête, Old Mines Area Historical Society](#)

October 14-15: [Fort de Chartres French and Indian War Encampment](#)

October 28: [Rural Heritage Day, Ste. Genevieve](#)

November 4-5: [Fort de Chartres Winter Rendezvous](#)

December 10: [Le Reveillon at the Felix Valle State Historic Site](#)

December 31: [La Guiannee, Ste. Genevieve](#)

December 31: [La Guiannee, Fort de Chartres](#)



What is Old Mines?

The Old Mines community, located in the north-east quadrant of Washington County, Missouri, is one of the oldest European settlements west of the Mississippi River. The area first attracted the attention of French explorers and settlers in the late 17th century due to its rich lead deposits (and the prospect of even more valuable minerals, which unfortunately proved to be untrue). Beginning in the 1720's, lead mining in this area became an integral part of the economic activity of the "Pays des Illinois," that region between the Great Lakes and present-day Louisiana that was settled by the French.

Now well into the 21st century, the Old Mines community continues to value its French legacy, with a variety of annual events celebrating nearly 300 years of the French presence in present-day Washington County, and interest in the preservation of the cultural legacy remains strong. Hopefully this project (with its website, newsletter, and Facebook page) will make contribute to the exchange of ideas and information about this fascinating aspect of American history.

"Arnault"

From the State Historical Society of Missouri website:

Place name: Arnault Branch

Description: Rises five miles north of Potosi and flows into Mineral Fork fourteen miles north of Potosi. The name is a phonetic variation or corruption of Renault. It was named for Philippe Francois Renault who had lead mines almost on the headwaters. Cf. Renault's Mine, below. (Goodspeed, 1888, 501; Wm. J. Cresswell)

Source: Zimmer, Gertrude M. "Place Names Of Five Southeast Counties Of Missouri." M.A. thesis., University of Missouri-Columbia, 1944.



There are two possible explanations for the origin of Arnault, although it is impossible to know which is correct. The more probable source of Arnault is "à Renault" (of Renault), as in the original French name for the Arnault branch of the Big River, "Fourche à Renault." Another possibility, however, is the not uncommon phenomenon in languages of metathesis, whereby two sounds in a word are transposed; in this case the initial "a" and "r."

The junction (where the photo was taken) of Arnault Branch Road and Highway 21 is in Old Mines just south of St. Joachim Catholic Church and where Highways 21 and 47 meet.

The Old Mines French Project

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CONTRIBUTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS WELCOME!

Do you have an idea for an article for the newsletter? Something you would like to see included? If so, please do not hesitate to get in touch! (Contact information to the left.) The only requirement is that it should be of interest to anyone wanting to know more about Old Mines, its history, its families, its church, and its lasting legacy.