



The History of Clay County



What you are about to read is the coordinated efforts of many people who felt the history of the area would be an interesting topic to share. The material assembled would not be here to share were it not for the contribution of these people and resources.

Many thanks go to John Dillingham, a man who is recognized by many as an authority on the history of Clay and Platte counties and to the Clay County Archives and its staff for their support and direction in the research that was completed there. While some of those who provided resource material might not be here today, they too deserve thanks for having left behind their accounting of what transpired in the birth and growing of Clay County and the surrounding area.



The Atkins Home, originally built in Clay County on land that was to be in Gladstone, Missouri. The original log structure built around 1822 still stands surrounded by the current home.

For just a moment, stop and look out your window. Can you imagine a time when you would look out and see nothing? A time when all you saw was tall prairie grass, your own vegetable garden, a milk cow and maybe a few chickens? A time when maybe the only passerby was an occasional Indian, trapper or hunter? A time when there was no organized neighborhood, paved roads or automobiles?

Now think about this: You decide to move 1,600 miles from here, and it is going to take you 147 days to get there. One hundred and forty-seven days because your average daily-travel distance is 11.5 miles. One hundred and forty-seven days to travel a distance that you could drive today in three days or fly in four hours. Would you go? Remember, we are talking about 147 days of sleeping in a wagon or on the ground, crossing mountains with no roads and maybe dealing with Indians who may or may not be friendly, never knowing what category they would fall into. Not being able to bathe everyday, in fact not even sure where you will find water next and knowing that you most likely will not meet anyone else along the way. There certainly are no big towns to stay in, no hotels and no running water other than what you find in a creek or river.

Before the Civil War, we were a place on the way to somewhere. When Clay County's first white settlers arrived, they came mainly from the Kentucky and Tennessee area. At the time they began settling in the county, they were truly pioneers settling on the very edge of civilization. To the west of the county was unknown territory, Indians and, for many, the hopes and dreams of a brighter future.

The Missouri Legislature established Clay County, Mo., as a county on January 2, 1822. Gallatin and Fishing River were the first townships established, and they were established on the same day the county was established. Liberty followed and was considered the first town in Clay County when they incorporated on May 2, 1825. The county boundaries extended north to the Iowa line over a territory of 2,000 square miles. It wasn't until 1833 that its size was reduced to its present-day size of 402 square miles. The 1836 Platte Purchase added 3,149 square miles to the state. The move to acquire this land started in 1835, was agreed upon in 1836 and declared a part of the state by President Van Buren on March 28, 1837. The Indians who the land was purchased from were the Ioway, the Sac and the Fox tribes. The negotiation of the purchase price that was agreed upon included \$7,500 for their land. The building of five comfortable houses for each tribe; divide 200 acres of land; fence 200 acres of land; furnish them with a farmer, blacksmith, teacher, interpreter and agricultural implements; and furnish them with livestock and a variety of other items. The tribes at the time numbered 1,000 Ioways, 1,200 Fox and 500 Sac. The tribes agreed to move west of the Missouri River to what is now known as Kansas and Nebraska.

In 1822, the population of Clay County was just 1,200 people, and the price of an acre of land was just \$1.25. By 1850, the population had grown to 10,332. The census information indicated 7,585 whites, five free colored and 2,742 slaves in our county. Fewer than 1,000 people were attending school in 1850.

People make history, and during our three-part segment, we will introduce you to a number of individuals who shaped our history. Many of these names you've heard of or will recognize. Individuals such as Col. Alexander Doniphan, Maj. Alvan Lightburne, Frank and Jesse James, David Rice Atchison, Robert Hugh Miller, Rev. Robert James, Joseph Smith, Maj. John Dougherty, along with Shubal Allen, Major Vivion, Peter Barnett, Thompson-Lampton, Woods and Dillingham.

We will introduce you to some of these people and the history of our county.



Ryan's Sawmill was located behind the Streets Store near what is now NE 68th & N. Campbell.

Prominent People in Early Clay County

In the days of the pioneers, settlements clustered around mills, blacksmith shops and the river. Prior to 1826, there were said to be settlements at Shoal Creek, Fishing River, Platte River and on the Missouri River. One of the most essential and most honored of all pioneer callings was that of blacksmith. Without him civilization could not have survived. The blacksmith was a laborer of the heaviest type and had the

most-skilled training. He was known to beat a plowshare into a sword and then beat the sword back into a plowshare whenever necessary. These men did more than a simple line of work. They built wagons, made yokes and shod oxen for farm uses. Among the pioneer blacksmiths who contributed to the progress of Clay County were George Stone, William Wymore, John Berry, Vick Brayer, Robert Atkins, Wallace Wood and Ed P. Armstrong.

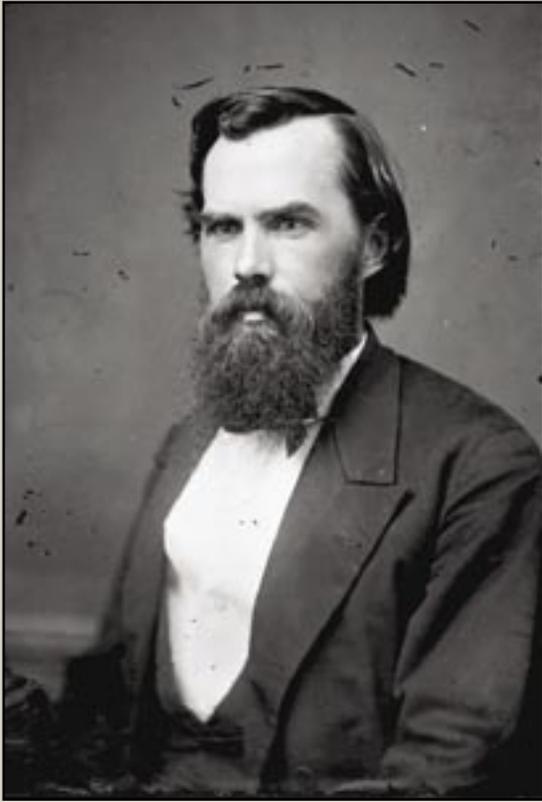
A part of the research for this series on Clay County and Gladstone history included several visits with John Dillingham. John has spent a great deal of time studying and learning the history of the Clay-Platte area. He has some excellent resources, in that his family and his mother's family were early settlers and inhabitants of this area. His mother and father are able to provide him with their recollections of the past in support of the family history. When we ask John who needed to be included in this series and who played "key roles" in the history and development of Clay County, he said that there were some folks who shouldn't be forgotten. We will begin our story with a look at some of these key people. ►



A Blacksmith Shop located in Liberty, Missouri on Kansas Street.

Page 11 Top photo: The Acme Springs Store was located in the general area of Happy Rock Park. Members of the Bender family are seen in this photograph taken in 1886. Bottom photo: Peter Burnett

PETER BURNETT



If you couldn't hunt, you were going to have a tough time making it as an early Missouri settler. Wild game was abundant, and farming wasn't quite established yet, not to mention that it does take time to grow those crops. The wild game of the area were rabbit, deer, squirrel, bear, turkey and prairie chickens, and in the right time of the year, waterfowl were abundant. Born in Nashville, Tenn., in 1807, Peter Burnett moved to Missouri as a young boy with his family in 1817. Originally settling in Howard County, Mo., they moved to Clay County in 1822.

The move to Clay County was not easy and, for the time, expensive. Their household furnishings were shipped from St. Louis up river to Liberty Landing. The 250-mile trip took 40 days to complete with the boat carrying their belongings being pulled up river by men on the shore with ropes attached to the boat. From all indications, the water level was extremely low in the river and this was the only way to move the boat. The men onshore are reported to have had to cut through the willows on the bank to make

a path to walk. The cost to have items shipped was expensive with the labor required, no doubt, having some bearing on those costs. Examples of shipping costs include coffee at 50 cents per pound, sugar at 25 to 37.5 cents per pound, calico at 37.5 to 50 cents per yard and brown cotton at 25 to 37.5 cents. Iron and salt, essentials to a farmer, were "very expensive" to ship and "hard to afford."

As a farming family, land was important to the Burnett family, and they purchased a tract of land that was 160 acres for \$1.25 per acre. This land needed to be cleared before it could be farmed. Burnett recalls in his book "provisions were scarce and high," forcing them to rely on their ability to raise crops that could be sold. They were successful, but just like things today, as the supply increased, the demand seemed to diminish and the prices dropped. For example, Indian corn was 10 cents a bushel, wheat 50 cents and pork \$1.25 per 100 pounds. In 1832, you could rent a log house in Liberty for \$25 a year; pork was \$1.50 per 100 pounds, wood \$1 per cord, corn meal 25 cents per bushel, potatoes 20 cents per bushel and chickens 75 cents per dozen.

Peter Burnett studied law and eventually became a lawyer. In 1839, Burnett, along with Alexander Doniphan and Amos Rees, were hired to represent Joseph Smith Jr., Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight and other Mormon leaders who were being held in the Liberty Jail. They, Smith and the others, were charged with treason, arson and robbery.

Burnett eventually became the district attorney for the newly formed circuit comprised of Andrew, Buchanan, Platte, Nodaway, Holt and Atchison counties that were acquired in the Platte Purchase. Living in Weston, Burnett left on May 22,



Streets Store which also housed the post office was located in what is now Gladstone, Missouri at NE 68th Street and N. Campbell.

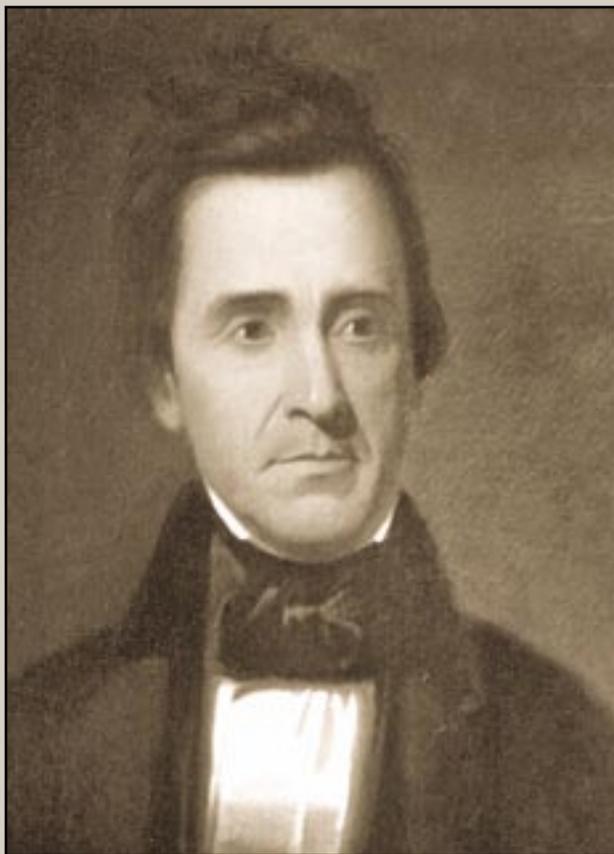


The Arsenal located at Liberty Landing.

1843, for Oregon, and on August 27, 1843, he found himself in the Rocky Mountains. He reached his destination of Fort Boise on October 16, 1843, having traveled 1,691 miles in 147 days. The average distance traveled in one day was 11.5 miles.

Information taken from "Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer" by Peter Burnett 1880.

DAVID RICE ATCHISON **U.S. President for one day**



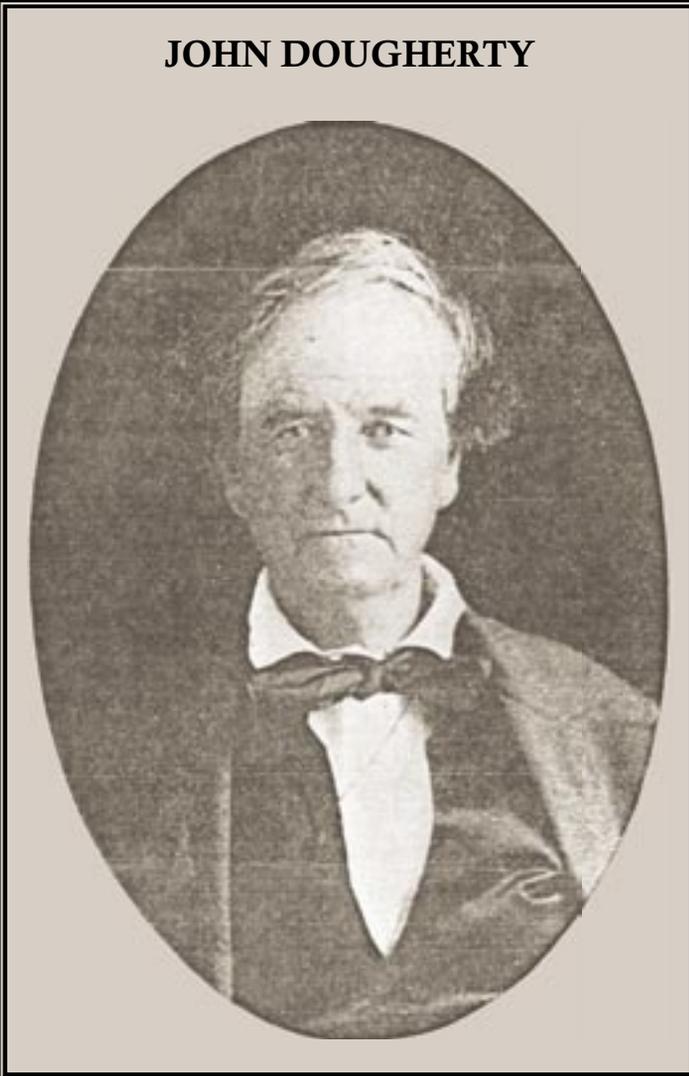
David Rice Atchison was born in Frogtown, Ky., in 1807. He attended Transylvania College in Lexington at the age of 14 and graduated four years later. After graduation he was admitted to the Kentucky Bar in 1829, and in 1830, he moved to Liberty, becoming the second lawyer in Clay County. He enjoyed a career in law practice and politics that began with his election to the Missouri House in 1834. One of his notable acts was to serve on the committee, petitioning Congress for the Platte Purchase. His efforts were notable to the extent that one of the counties formed in the Platte Purchase was named after him. Based on the information available, the addition of the successful Platte Purchase is the only time a state added to its size after being recognized as a state.

In 1841, a new judicial circuit was established for the six counties of the Platte Purchase, and Atchison was appointed as the first circuit judge for this area. Two years later, he was appointed by the Governor of Missouri to fill the vacancy left in the United States Senate by the death of Senator Linn. Atchison was just 36 years old and was not only the youngest Missouri senator to hold office, but he was also the first senator from western Missouri. Atchison was elected to be president pro tem of the Senate during his second term in office. In 1849, he was reportedly the United States President for one day, when the term of President Polk and Vice President Dallas expired. President-elect Zachary Taylor refused to take the oath of office on the Sabbath, and thus Atchison, as Senate president pro tem, became President for one day at the age of 42 years and 11 months.

As a senator, Atchison was a moving force in the repeal of the Missouri Compromise as a part of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. The Missouri Compromise was a bill that was passed when the Missouri Territory moved for statehood in 1820. The bill prohibited slavery in the remainder of the Louisiana Purchase. The purpose behind such a compromise was to maintain an equal number of free and slave states. ►

The repeal of this act allowed slavery to exist in Missouri. A driving factor in this was to avoid having a slave region to the west of Missouri, now known as Kansas.

Information taken from the Frontier Politician by Moore, Early History by Moore and Proslavery Background by Malin.



John Dougherty was born in 1791 in Nelson County, Ky. When he was 17 years old, he ran away to St. Louis and joined an expedition to the northwest of the Missouri Fur Company of Sarpy, Picot and Choteau. He was hired to be a hunter for the expedition. It was not long after they started that Dougherty was nicknamed "Iron Leg" because of his demonstrated endurance on the trail. He spent seven years in the mountains and learned seven Indian languages and French from the trappers. In 1819, Dougherty worked as a translator for Major Benjamin O'Fallon, who was the Indian agent for the upper Missouri tribes. In 1821, Dougherty succeeded O'Fallon as the Indian agent. Dougherty continued to enjoy success working with the Indians and eventually accepted a position at Fort

Leavenworth, where he administered the Indian department policy for all the area above the mouth of the Kansas River. His primary goals were to bring peace among the tribes and to teach them agricultural skills. This was an exceptional challenge considering that these people, like Dougherty, were traditionally hunters and not farmers. Dougherty continued to work as an Indian agent until June 1839.

At the age of 46, Dougherty started a new career in freighting for the government and as a sutler at Army posts. He bought land in Clay County that included several thousand acres north of Liberty. In 1855 and 1856, Dougherty built a mansion on his land that was said to be the finest home west of the Mississippi River at a cost of \$20,000. This mansion was named Multnomah in memory of the falls in the Columbia River Gorge. Multnomah was neglected for many years and burned down in 1963.

Dougherty did serve one term in the General Assembly, but returned home to farm his large estate with the 56 slaves he owned. His sons owned 13 slaves on the adjoining farms. As a prominent slave owner, Dougherty chaired an April 1855 county meeting that voiced approval of the destruction of the *Parkville Luminary* press by a pro-slavery mob. The people were angry because the editor was opposed to Missourians voting in Kansas Territory.

Information taken from Major John Dougherty by Eldridge, Southern Interest by Craik, Historic Clay County by Fuefhausen.



Multnomah built by John Dougherty in 1855 for \$20,000.00. The mansion burned down in 1963.

ALEXANDER W. DONIPHAN



enjoyed meeting each other in the courtroom. The Mormons retained both men, along with Amos Rees and W. T. Wood, to represent them in their Jackson County troubles. The Mormons had been driven from Jackson County, and their land was taken from them. Doniphan played the lead role in working for a compromise that would lead to the return of the land, and as an officer in the Liberty Blues militia, he also provided protection for the Mormons in their court appearances. There were a number of Mormons who settled in Clay County and their troubles continued. In 1834, Doniphan spoke against the vigilante attacks on the Mormons in a public meeting. He stood and defended the right of liberty for all citizens and individuals. He was in favor of law and order and strongly opposed mob violence. While the inevitable outcome did not have the desired result, he had represented them aggressively enough that he was hired again after the Mormon War of 1838. It was during this period of incarceration that the prophet Joseph Smith and Mormon leaders Sidney Rigdon and Lyman Wight were held in the Liberty jail.

In 1846, Doniphan joined the Missouri volunteers as a private for the Mexican War. While he enlisted as a private, he was elected to the rank of Colonel of the First Missouri Volunteers. Doniphan's approach to dealing with his men was a little unorthodox and called into question by regular Army Colonel Stephen Kearny. Doniphan's position was that they were 600 miles from contact and there was no need to force submission and discipline on the men and their horses, as that would do more harm than good. As things go, New Mexico fell without a fight; Kearny was promoted; and Doniphan, a lawyer, was left behind in the military occupation to draft laws and a constitution for the newly occupied New Mexico. William Connelly, in a book he wrote about Doniphan, said he led the "most remarkable military campaign in American History." Of course the campaign for Doniphan extended well beyond New Mexico into Mexico as far as Saltillio, the state of Chihuahua, in the defense of Texas and supported the United States claim to the Rio Grande as the border. His "irregular" volunteers won battles at Brazito and Sacramento against tremendous odds and with only minimum casualties being sustained by his men.

After the war, Doniphan returned to Liberty, where he became the first superintendent of schools in Clay County. He was influential in obtaining William Jewell College for Liberty. He also became a strong supporter of the pro-slavery movement in Kansas, but he did not vote in Kansas or participate in raids into the territory. In 1856, he became the director of the Clay County Pro-Slavery Aid Association, raising money for those southerners who wanted to go to Kansas.

Information taken from Doniphan by Lanius, Doniphan's Epic March by Dawson, Kansas: a cyclopedia of state history. ►

Remembered as a statesman and a soldier, Doniphan was born in Mason County, Ky., on July 9, 1808. His father passed when he was 5 years old and bequeathed to him one slave boy and part of the family farm. Having gone to live with an older brother in Augusta, Ky., he entered Augusta College at the age of 14 and graduated four years later. He studied law with a local firm and was admitted to the bar in 1829. He first located his practice in Lexington, Mo., "riding circuit" with the judge and his fellow lawyers, Abiel Leonard and David Atchison. He followed Atchison to Liberty and established his law practice there in 1833. Doniphan built a strong reputation as a criminal lawyer during this time, gaining a great deal of fame.

Doniphan and Atchison became friends, having many things in common, including hunting and fishing. They often participated in games at local taverns and





Hemp was a major crop of the area in the 1800's and a Hemp Press, above, was used to press the hemp into bales.

Barry was just one of many of the settlements in Clay County. It was established as an Indian trading post in the 1830s. It's been rumored that Indians were prohibited from purchasing alcohol on Indian territory; however, many came to Barry to the Indian Trading Post to purchase their alcohol, so many in fact that a "drive-thru" was created.

Other settlements included Elm Grove, just six miles southeast of Smithville; Randolph, which was also called Blue Eagle and Arnold; Allen's Landing, which became Baxter's Landing and later Liberty Landing; Greenville and Clayville; Gosneyville (now Paradise); Moscow; Mosby; Excelsior Springs; Centerville (now Kearney); and Harlem, a steam ferry landing on the northern bank of the Missouri River. Missouri City was Clay County's only old river town and one that went by several different names—Williams' Landing, Richfield, St. Bernard, Atchison and finally incorporated into Missouri City.

The next issue of *Coming Home to Gladstone* will feature Clay County entering the Civil War and provide an overview of what many people believed at the time of that war. Of course it has been said, "If we had won the war, the Plaza would be north of the River." It will be another interesting look at the past.

SLAVERY IN CLAY COUNTY

Throughout our history, many names have been affixed to different people or ethnic groups in our country. This is obvious when you read historical books and documents, and for many, the names chosen are offensive and insulting. This remains the case today and is the result of upbringing, family values, education and acceptance of the fact that it is all right to be different. This article simply reflects some of the names given to a specific group of people in our country at the time of these occurrences. The use of these terms is not intended to insult, defame or hurt any person or group of people.

Slavery is a part of our history, albeit an uncomfortable part. Missouri and Kansas played a large part in determining the freedom of people of color. Missouri's emancipation of slaves was issued two years before Abraham Lincoln's declaration. Slavery was officially abolished in the state on January 11, 1865. By this time, most slaves had freed themselves by either running away, becoming employed or joining the Union Army. Slaves emancipated in 1865 amounted to \$40,000,000 in investment loss to Missouri slaveholders. Clay County ranked nine out of the top 10 counties in Missouri with the largest number of slaves in 1860. The Clay County slave population made up 26.5 percent of the counties total 13,037 inhabitants.

In 1860, there were 3,572 free colored people in the state of Missouri compared to 114,931 slaves. Top male slaves who were healthy and in good physical condition, when sold, brought about \$1,300 each, and strong, healthy female slaves about \$1,000. In general, most of Missouri slave owners had only one or two slaves. Missouri slaves were used for a variety of tasks. They were employed as valets, butlers, handymen, fieldhands, maids, nurses and cooks. The last known slave auction in the county was held in 1861.

Masters often hired out their slaves during periods when the slave was otherwise likely to be unemployed. This was a common practice used by widows.

Missouri slaves, not unlike the landowners, became jack-of-all trades. Tools and implements would break and need mending, livestock had to be cared for and buildings built and repaired. Many of the slaves became skilled laborers—blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, bricklayers and horticulturists, as well as general all-around troubleshooters for the entire farm. Two colored blacksmiths in Clay County were known for their exceptional work and are mentioned by name in various historical documents. They were Uncle Shadrack and Tip Walker. The latter was a manufacturer of knives and achieved a wide reputation as an artisan.

Under the territorial slave code of 1804, slaves were made personal property. If a white person assaulted a slave, it was considered trespassing and nothing more. It didn't work that way for the slave; however, and they were severely punished. One could not do business with a slave without the prior consent of the owner; persons found violating that code were subject to paying the owner four times the value of the item bought or sold. Ferrymen or other persons who carried a slave

across the Mississippi River without written permission of his owner were required to pay the cost of the slave and damages to the owner.

Slaves walked freely on the streets in Clay County, and in Liberty; however, they were forced to abide by a curfew. Slave patrols were established, and laws passed in the county in 1824 and in Liberty in 1827, which prohibited a slave from being out after curfew. Slaves were punished when found by the patrols. Slaves were not permitted to keep a gun. A slave caught carrying a gun would receive 39 lashes and forfeit the gun. In 1825, a law was passed declaring blacks to be incompetent as witnesses in legal cases involving whites.

In 1847, an ordinance was passed specifically prohibiting the education of negroes was passed. It wasn't until the Missouri Legislature passed a set of school laws, which took effect on March 15, 1866, that colored children began receiving education in the state of Missouri. Among the provisions was one that stated that separate schools should be provided for colored children, where they numbered more than 20 in a district. In January 1865, all slaves in Missouri were declared free at the St. Louis Convention; however, they did not receive the right to vote in the state until 1870. Among Clay County's first ►



The Barry General Store

deeds of emancipation were Tom, a man of color, by Henry Estes and Sylvia, a woman of color, by John Evans in February 1823, 42 years before the proclamation of emancipation became law.

In 1889, the last known Missouri slave, Edie Hickam, was finally told she was free. Her owner, Joseph Hickam, kept her in ignorance of her freedom for 24 years. In 1889, she filed suit for \$5 a month (\$1,400). She won her case, but was awarded only \$700 in a court in Booneville, Mo.

Missouri was the first state to see colored troops in combat. At Island Mound, Mo., in the western part of the state, the first Kansas colored volunteer infantry saw action against



A Buffalo Soldier

Confederates on October 29, 1862. Most of the men in this unit were former slaves from Arkansas and Missouri. Missouri ranked fourth in the Union States in regard to the number of colored troop

enlistments (8,344). This represented 39 percent of the prewar black males (21,167) age 18 to 45. Many of these soldiers remained in the Army after the Civil War and continued to serve in all-black regiments and became known as the "Buffalo Soldiers." Originally, members of the 10th Cavalry Regiment of the U.S. Army, The Buffalo Soldiers, were officially formed on September 21, 1866, at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. The last surviving "Buffalo Soldier," Mark Matthews, died on September 6, 2005, at the age of 111. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.



Top photo: Big Shoal Church was located near the Atkins home and located in what is now the Big Shoal Cemetery in Gladstone.

Bottom photo: The old Liberty Jail in which Joseph Smith and other Mormon leaders were incarcerated in 1837.



CLAY COUNTY FIRSTS

Missouri first became a territory under the Territorial Act of 1812. It was admitted into the Union as a slave state in 1820 and became the 24th state on August 10, 1821.

Clay County became recognized as a county on January 2, 1822. The first court was held in the county on February 11, 1822. The judge was David Todd, uncle of Mary Todd, who was the wife of President Abraham Lincoln. The first county judges were John Thornton, Elisha Cameron and James Gilmore. Elder William Thorp was the first recorded minister in Clay County. Martin "Ring-tailed Painter" Parmer was the first elected senator.

The first election was held in August 1822. In January 1822, there were 1,200 people in Clay County and only 240 were "registered voters." By 1850, the population in Clay County had grown to 10,332. (whites, 7,588; free colored, 5; slave colored, 2, 742).

Finis Ewing Telford (sometimes spelled Tilford) was the first child born in Clay County. He was born on March 29, 1822. In 1823, the first stone jail, costing less than \$600, was built. This jail was the site of Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Sidney Ridgon, Alexander McRae and Caleb Baldwin's incarceration. These men were considered the leaders of the Latter Day Saint Movement.

The first county commissioners in Clay County were Henry Estes, Enos Vaugh, Wyatt Adkins and John Pouge. In 1832, the first courthouse was built. It burned in 1857 and has been rebuilt twice.

When Clay County was first established, it was more than 2,000 square miles. On January 2, 1833, the county was reduced to the size it is today, 402 square miles.

The first public schools were instituted in the county on February 9, 1839. State funding for public schools did not begin until 1842. These schools were rather meager in their results until the act of February 1853, set apart 25 percent of the state revenue for the support of common schools.

The first county fair was held in 1895, and the first hard surface roads were not built in Clay County until 1922. ■