

IN THE BOOTHEEL, THE LANDSCAPE TELLS A STORY

by Bonnie Stepenoff

The Bootheel wears its history on its sleeve. The land is flat. Drainage ditches, railroad tracks, and highways stretch to the horizon. Fence lines look like gridlines on a map. Prosperity shows, and so do the marks of hard times.

Long before Euro-Americans settled in the six counties along the Mississippi River in extreme southeastern Missouri, farmers and traders built elevated towns in the region. The Mississippian people left an eloquent record of their culture in earthen mounds, stone tools, projectile points, ceramic pots, bowls, pipes, and human and animal effigies. Towosahgy State Historic Site encompasses a large village mound that has added important information to the archaeological record of this pre-Columbian civilization.

After the American Revolution, a veteran named George Morgan planned a city with wide streets and grand plazas on the western bank of the Mississippi south of the convergence with the Ohio River. Political intrigue foiled his ambitions, but the town of New Madrid endured, first in Spanish, and soon in American territory. With a commission from Spain, French map-maker Nicolas de Finiels traveled through the area, describing the land between New Madrid and Cape Girardeau as “a chaos of trees, water, and mire.”

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark observed the landscape on their way north to St. Louis, where they began their expedition to the West. According to historian James Denny, the explorers noted giant cattails growing in the

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The Hunter-Dawson Mansion built of cypress wood in Missouri's Bootheel.

JOIN MPA'S BOOTHEEL ADVENTURE!

New Madrid, the place that gave its name to a great earthquake, will be the site of MPA's 21st Annual Meeting, October 25-27, 2002.

There are many reasons to come to this old city, with its spectacular view of the Mississippi River, in the heart of Missouri's southern Bootheel. The seven Bootheel counties were sparsely settled until lumbering and swamp drainage in the early twentieth century “reclaimed” the land for farming. In the 1920s, “cotton fever” seized the region, shaping a distinct cultural identity closely linked to the cotton-growing South. The Bootheel retains a unique character and flavor well worth experiencing.

The annual meeting will feature field trips to Big Oak Tree State Park, a remnant of vanishing hardwood and cypress swamp, the antebellum Hunter-Dawson mansion built of cypress wood, Morris State Park, Towosahgy State Historic Site and other natural and cultural treasures of the flatlands. Headquarters for the meeting will be the New Madrid Community Center .

Details are listed on page 5. Please mark your calendars and fill out and return the registration form to plan a Bootheel experience!

UPOP COMES TO ST. LOUIS

by Susan Flader

After two successful years in Kansas City, MPA's Urban Populations Outreach Project this summer is providing outings to state parks and historic sites for urban core youths of St. Louis as well. Launched by St. Louis MPA directors Eleanor Hoefle, Ron Coleman, John Karel and others, with assistance from Kansas City director Mary Abbott who conceived the program several years ago, the St. Louis effort is headquartered this summer at the Green Center for Outdoor Environmental Education and the Arts in University City. It is being ably coordinated by Michael Nelson with assistance from Kathy Bayless and an intern.

Groups of up to thirty youngsters from schools, churches, Americorps, and other summer social service programs visit the Green Center for themed activities relating to water quality, wetlands, prairie, or woods, including environmental art or building bird houses. Then, on a subsequent day, they visit a park (this year groups went to Washington, Babler, Castlewood, Scott Joplin, Route 66, Mastodon, and Meramec) to pursue activities targeted by park staff to deepen understanding of the chosen theme, such as collecting and studying critters from a river. One group hit the jackpot—a campout in tents back at the Green Center after their Meramec trip, complete with astronomical observation through telescopes provided by volunteers from the Astronomical Society. For many of the youths, this is their first visit to a state park. Mike Nelson reports that he has had to pay overtime to bus drivers because the kids are having so much fun they simply do not want to leave.

The Kansas City UPOP is being ably coordinated again this summer by Shalonn Curls, under the guidance of Mary Abbott. Field trips have been scheduled for about fourteen groups from Ozanam Home, Friendship Village 4-H Program, Linwood YMCA, and other programs for disadvantaged youths. The youngsters travel to the Bruce Watkins State Museum, Watkins Mill State Park and Historic Site, and other park units to learn about history or natural history and enjoy picnics, swimming, and hikes. Some groups bike on the Katy Trail or enjoy Truman Lake by boat, with the assistance of state park staff ably coordinated by Jeff Durban. A new feature planned for this summer is an overnight stay at Camp Pin Oak at Lake of the Ozarks State Park, in partnership with the Kauffman Foundation.

MPA has committed up to \$5,000 each for the St. Louis and Kansas City Programs and has



Teen Action Group at Washington State Park on stream walk with park naturalist.

undertaken fundraising to supplement the estimated \$20,000 budget. More than 85 MPA members have responded generously to a special appeal mailed in June, and a number of foundations and corporations have also been approached, but more funds are needed. **There is still time to help. You may make a tax deductible contribution with a check payable to Missouri Parks Association (for UPOP); send to The Callaway Bank, P.O. Box 10, Fulton, MO 65251.** Deepest thanks to all who have helped with the program this year.

Park Brief...

*Lee C. Fine Airport,
Lake of the Ozarks State Park.*

In a continuing effort to address issues related to the City of Osage Beach's unpermitted land clearance and resulting erosion at Lee C. Fine Airport in Lake of the Ozarks State Park (see April 2002 *Heritage*), DNR in July wrote the city asking for copies of all applicable permits for construction, insisting on compliance with stormwater laws and related DNR directives, requesting an annual report on all airport activities and plans with the first report due by September 1, asking for negotiations to resolve the issue of restitution for lost trees and other costs, demanding development and implementation of a pollution prevention plan, and assessing a penalty of \$35,000 for violations of the Missouri Clean Water Law. MPA will monitor further developments.

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swampy ground at Tywappity Bottoms in present-day Mississippi County. Lewis, but not Clark, visited a trader named Louis Lorimier in his house at Cape Girardeau in 1803.

While Euro-Americans surged into Ste. Genevieve, Fredericktown, and other communities to the north and west, most avoided the Bootheel wetlands with their thick hardwood and cypress forests. The New Madrid Earthquake of 1811 rearranged the landscape, shifting the course of the river, creating lakes, and further discouraging settlement.

Some people came anyway, lured by rich soil and game-filled forests. Backwoodsmen made a living, hunting beaver, raccoon, game birds and deer. Others, mostly Southerners from Kentucky and Tennessee, raised corn and livestock on stretches of high ground like Crowley's Ridge. Morris State Park in Dunklin County preserves a portion of the ridge, containing many plants and animals not found elsewhere in Missouri.

Substantial citizens like William Hunter built high-style homes and ordered fine furniture from cities in the North and the East. Hunter, a merchant, died before workmen completed his Civil War-era mansion, built of cypress-wood, but his wife Amanda and their descendants remained in the home until the 1950s. His carefully-restored home is the centerpiece of Hunter-Dawson State Historic Site in New Madrid.

Because of its proximity to the Mississippi River, the Bootheel, a Southern-leaning section of a Union-controlled state, saw some action during the Civil War. The Battle of Belmont in Mississippi County, was indecisive, but deadly. On November 7, 1861, federal troops crossed the river from Cairo and drove the Confederates out of their earthen fortifications, but the southerners quickly rallied and forced the enemy to flee. Both sides claimed victory, and each suffered more than 600 casualties.

After the war, an Illinois lawyer named Louis Houck siezed the chance to make a fortune in undeveloped land on the west bank of the river. By constructing nearly five hundred miles of short-line railroads, Houck opened the Bootheel to lumbering and swamp drainage. Eventually,

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DOROTHY BOYER HEINZE 1911-2002

State parks lost a tireless advocate when Dorothy Heinze of Imperial died Saturday, July 27, of complications during surgery. She was 91. Dorothy was a founder of the Missouri Parks Association, author of its statement of purposes, and a loyal, generous, and politically astute member of the board throughout the two decades of MPA's existence. "She was a warrior of an ilk we seldom see, a wonderful, wonderful person completely dedicated to her home state and region," said John Karel, an MPA director and former director of state parks.

Known affectionately to some as Mrs. Mastodon, Dorothy with three other local women formed the Mastodon Park Committee in 1974 and led a creative and unrelenting effort to raise more than half a million dollars to save the historic Kimmswick Bone Bed south of St. Louis in Jefferson County. Her dogged determination to secure archaeological investigations at the new park in the face of professional skepticism was rewarded in 1979 by the discovery of a Clovis spearpoint in mastodon bone, the first undisputed evidence of the association of man and mastodon in North America. In 1984 Dorothy and her committee hosted a Mastodon field trip for MPA's First Missouri Conference on State Parks, cooking (and donating) one of their fabulous picnic buffets for more than a hundred people. She rallied support for museum development and educational programs at the park for more than a quarter century, and founded the Mastodon Art-Science Regional Fair of Jefferson County.

A descendent of 18th century French lead miners (the Boyer family) at Old Mines in Washington County, Dorothy was a passionate and highly knowledgeable historian who raised public consciousness of heritage values through her articles and newspaper columns as well as leading the charge to save key historic, archaeological, and botanical sites, among them Fort Hill and Victoria Glade. Active to the end in the Kimmswick Historical Society, the Old Mines Historical Society, and the Webster Groves Nature Study Society, among other organizations, she was a leader in the recent successful fight against the proposed Isle of Capri Casino at Kimmswick. At the time of her death she was deeply involved in an effort to save another imperiled tract of glades near Victoria Glade.

Dorothy is survived by her husband, Albert, a devoted partner in her endeavors who himself donated an important rock and mineral collection to Missouri Mines State Historic Site. Also surviving are a sister and two daughters.

PARK BRIEFS....

Lewis and Clark Sites.

A hill at the confluence of the Osage and Missouri Rivers that William Clark climbed on June 1, 1804, to get the lay of the land has been donated to the state by William and Carol Norton of Osage City and will be known as the Clark's Hill/Norton State Historic Site. The park division hopes to develop access and interpretation in time for the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition in June 2004. Among other Lewis and Clark-related efforts are development of a new park at Confluence Point at the junction of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, further development at Lewis and Clark State Park near St. Joseph, interpretive signs at numerous locations along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, and several other projects in earlier stages. Watch for a feature article in an upcoming issue of *Heritage*.

Conceptual Development Plans for Parks.

The state park division is engaged in long-range planning for further development at a number of parks in northern Missouri this year. A new effort to post preliminary plans on the internet for public review and comment began this year. Among the parks in various stages of the conceptual planning process are Van Meter, Babler, Mark Twain, Pershing, and Crowder.

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big railroad corporations like the Frisco bought out Houck's lines. Late in life, Houck wrote history books and looked back nostalgically on the untouched landscape that existed before the railroads came. A remnant of this landscape survives at Big Oak Tree State Park.

By the turn of the century, lumber companies acquired thousands of acres of Bootheel forest and cut millions of board feet every year. Sawmills whirred in hamlets along the railroad lines, as workers surged into hastily built shelters and company housing. Lumber towns like Deering (Pemiscot County) were clearings in the wilderness, where residents

supplemented their diets by hunting and fishing. Gradually, as the sawmills did their work, both the lumber and the game disappeared, and workers had to find other jobs or move on.

During the lumber boom, ambitious farmers like Thad Snow, who saw himself as a twentieth-century frontiersman, seized the opportunity to buy cleared or uncleared tracts of rich Mississippi River bottom land. Snow and other landowners dug ditches, laid drain tile, and systematically routed water from the cleared fields into rivers and streams. Beginning in 1905, the Little River Drainage District, a tax-supported public works organization, drained more

than a million acres of swampland between Cape Girardeau and the Arkansas state line.

Floods posed a constant threat to the "recovered" farm land. In 1912 and 1913, farmers took to the high ground, huddling with their livestock on Indian mounds and ridges, and refugees flocked into Bootheel towns. The devastating flood of 1927 wreaked havoc throughout the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys, goading the federal government into action. Within two years, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers created the New Madrid Floodway, girded by a primary and a secondary or "setback" levee between Bird's

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New Madrid Floodway—Big Oak Tree State Park.

The Corps of Engineers in July issued its long awaited Final Revised Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the St. John's Basin—New Madrid Floodway Project (see April 2002 *Heritage*). The document, open for comment until August 19, seems to commit the Corps to an engineered solution to the potentially devastating hydrological impacts of the project on Big Oak Tree State Park, but MPA can find no detailed analysis, cost figures, or other substantial commitment in the three-inch-thick report. There are also unresolved issues of water quality if pumped groundwater is substituted for Mississippi River water. Moreover, although more than 1,000 acres to buffer the park were included as the first of 15 mitigation sites in a preliminary list, the Big Oak site was dropped from the final list of mitigation sites, apparently because priority was given to fish spawning habitat. MPA intends to submit formal comments.

Missouri State Park eFriends.

The DNR state park division has begun an electronic newsletter that is produced four times a year, providing information on activities, new initiatives, and the latest developments. To become an eFriend and receive regular email updates, send an email to moparks@mail.dnr.state.mo.us.

Plan now to attend MPA’s 21st Annual Meeting and Conference in New Madrid. All MPA members and guests are most welcome at this gathering, which will feature a reception at the New Madrid Historical Museum, discussions about environmental issues in the Bootheel, and a field trip to Big Oak Tree State Park, Morris State Park, Hunter-Dawson State Historic Site, Towosahgy State Historic Site and other sites of historical and cultural interest.

**MPA 21st ANNUAL MEETING (20th ANNIVERSARY)
NEW MADRID, 25-27 OCTOBER 2002**

Friday, 25 October

- 4:30 pm Gather at New Madrid Historical Museum, 1 Main Street, downtown on the river, for a museum tour.
- 5:15 pm Reception at the museum
- 6:30pm Dinner on your own

Saturday, 26 October

- 8:45am Registration—New Madrid Community Center at 1199 Mill Street (From I-55 Exit 40, go north on Highway 61 to New Madrid. There will be a golf course on the right. Turn right onto Mill Street. The Community Center will be a brick building on the left. The Country Club will be on the right.)
- 9:00am Welcome to New Madrid: Mike Comer, Site Administrator, Hunter-Dawson State Historic Site
- 9:15am State of the Parks Address: Doug Eiken, Director of State Parks
- 10:00 MPA’s Urban Populations Outreach Project: A Report
- 10:15 “Snow’s Corner: Thad Snow and Environmental Change in the Bootheel”—Bonnie Stepenoff
- 10:45 Cultural and Natural Heritage Issues in Missouri’s Bootheel – a roundtable with DNR staff and others
- 12:00n Leave by caravan from Community Center for field trip to Bootheel parks and sites. Box lunch will be provided. The tour will include Big Oak Tree State Park, Morris State Park, Towosahgy State Historic Site, Hunter-Dawson State Historic Site.
- 6:30pm Reception at New Madrid Community Center
- 7:00pm Annual Dinner at Community Center (Secretary of State Matt Blunt invited)

Sunday, 27 October

- 7:30am Breakfast on your own
- 9am Annual Meeting of Members (Meeting Room, Marston Super-8)
- 10am Board of Directors Meeting (members welcome to attend)
- 12n Adjourn

ACCOMMODATIONS

Rooms are available at the Marston Super-8 Motel, Highway I-55, Exit 40, just a few miles south of New Madrid, at a rate of \$58.90 per night for a double room. Make reservations by calling the motel at 573-643-9888; reservations should be made prior to October 1.

REGISTRATION FORM

Name _____
 Address _____
 Phone _____ email _____

Registration fee ____ persons @ \$15 each \$ _____
 Lunch (Sat.) _____ @ \$10 each \$ _____
 Dinner Saturday _____ @ \$20 each \$ _____
 Total enclosed \$ _____

Make check payable to **Missouri Parks Association** and mail with form by October 19 to: Eleanor Hoefle, MPA Treasurer, 1234 Hoyt Dr., St. Louis 63137. **Please register in advance** to aid in planning. For questions or late registration call Eleanor Hoefle, treasurer, 314-869-6534; Bonnie Stepenoff, meeting chair, 573-651-2831; or Susan Flader, MPA president 573-442-1058.

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Point and New Madrid. The floodway provided a safety valve in the event of a future great flood that threatened the city of Cairo, Illinois, or other population centers down river.

Despite the danger of flooding, white and black farmers, tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and day laborers surged into the Bootheel, looking for a chance to own a piece of land or to escape poverty in the rural South. By the early 1920s, Bootheel farmers devoted much of their acreage to cotton production, relying on the skills the new arrivals brought with them. Tenant farmers came with mules and farm equipment of their own; sharecroppers brought nothing but themselves and their families, relying on landowners to furnish seed and subsistence in return for their labor and half of the crop.

The 1930s brought all kinds of misery to the Bootheel. As cotton prices tumbled, many landowners faced bankruptcy, and sharecroppers suffered eviction and destitution. New Deal recovery programs paid cotton farmers to take portions of their acreage out

of production, which saved farm owners, but made conditions even worse for tenants and sharecroppers. During a disastrous winter flood in 1937, the Corps of Engineers dynamited the primary levee, inundating the New Madrid Floodway and forcing thousands of farm workers to flee for their lives. By the winter of 1939, threatened with another year of misery, Bootheel sharecroppers were ready to make a dramatic stand.

An African-American sharecropper and Baptist minister named Owen Whitfield emerged as the leader of a peaceful, well-organized protest that drew national attention to the situation in southeastern Missouri. Quietly, during the early morning hours of January 10, 1939, hundreds of families appeared on the roadsides along Highway 60 between Sikeston and Charleston and Highway 61 between Sikeston and Hayti. When Highway Department officials reacted with consternation, Thad Snow told them it was a good demonstration and the farm workers had every right to be there. Within a week, the state took action and removed the

demonstrators from the roadsides. But they had made their point.

In his memoir, *From Missouri*, Snow recalled that he had seen things in the Bootheel that he would never have seen anywhere else. Among these things were a monumental drainage effort, cataclysmic floods, unconscionable suffering, and a great protest against poverty and injustice. Shirley Whitfield Farmer, daughter of Owen Whitfield, reflected in a recent interview that people did not realize such hardship existed until her father brought it out onto the roadsides for everyone to see.

In the flatlands, it is difficult to hide the truth.

To learn more about the Bootheel, plan to attend MPA's annual meeting, which will include visits to Big Oak Tree State Park, Towosahgy State Park, Morris State Park, Hunter-Dawson State Historic Site, and other landmarks.



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