

## Why choose Washington County, Missouri?

The focal point for most communities is to showcase why they are there. What's their purpose? What's their strategy? Our history embarked during the 18<sup>th</sup> century at the time of the Industrial Revolution.

In Washington County, Missouri you will find top manufactures like Purcell Tire and Rubber Company, Redwing Shoe Company and Buckman Laboratories as well as logging and timber companies, antique stores and mom and pop shops just to name a few. *This keeps our local economy on the upward swing and we appreciate each one and welcome new endeavors.*

Washington County has approximately 135,000 acres of Mark Twain National Forest land. Rivers and lakes and even the "Trail of Tears" runs through the county. Many visitors visit area attractions based on history. *Here's our story.....*

### Area History

#### "The Miner's Prospect"

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#### THE WAY WEST BEGAN IN POTOSI

The cutting edge of the American frontier moved steadily westward from the Atlantic, and in the late 1700's and early 1800's, Potosi, historic mining settlement in interior Missouri, was the "far West", and from its ranks sent settlers scurrying even further west to the Pacific.

Historian Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, in 1818, described Potosi as "the last village of white inhabitants between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean," and the village at the time was home for the Austin Family; for Major Andrew Henry and Colonel William H. Ashley; for Spaniard Pedro Vial, scooting in and out of Missouri between trips blazing the Santa Fe Trail; and for many others who helped swell their ranks on "the way West."

The major contribution to the expanding America came from the Austin's and the Ashley-Henry men.

#### THE AUSTIN EMPIRE

A Connecticut Yankee was Moses Austin, and intrepid entrepreneur who had been an importer in Philadelphia and a lead miner at Richmond. In 1797, learning of the rich lead deposits in Missouri discovered by the French, he visited Missouri and obtained a grant from the Spanish officials covering a large part of Azor's mines at Mine Au Breton. He brought his family, and 30 others, here in 1798 and settled in his magnificent home, Durham Hall.

Here Austin transformed the primitive mining methods of the French into Missouri's first major

industry, turning out the first lead sheet cannonballs made in Missouri. By 1802 he was smelting all the lead for the district, and in 1809 he established Herculaneum, north on the Mississippi, for shot production and a shipping point for lead.

But he overreached, took his fortune from the mines and invested it into a banking venture in St. Louis, which failed and left him financially ruined by 1819.

Seeking to retrieve his fortune, he set out for Texas in November 1820. There was a chance meeting with a Spanish official he had known in Missouri and got him an audience, and permission from the Spanish to settle the first 300 American families in Texas.

The hardships of the return journey were too rigorous for him, and he died in June 1821, three weeks after his arrival back home in Missouri. He and his wife, Maria, are buried in the Old Cemetery in Potosi.

Carrying out Austin's plan and becoming the "Father of Texas." Was his son, Stephen F. Austin, who respected his father's deathbed wish and took the colony on into Texas. Stephen has spent his boyhood at Potosi and represented Washington County in the territorial legislature for six years.

Stephen carried on delicate negotiations with the Spanish as his Austin colony grew, and when friction flamed between the Spanish and Mexicans and the growing American colonies, served as commander-in-chief of the Army of Texas in the struggle for Texas independence.

With the formation of the Republic of Texas, Austin was named the first secretary of State. He died soon after on December 27, 1836 – but not before placing his stamp on the Southwest and his name on the new state's capitol – Austin.

### **THE ASHLEY-HENRY MEN**

Their names were legion; the hardy fur trappers who blazed new trails across the Rockies, but it all began with a Missouri newspaper ad.

In 1822, William H. Ashley advertised in the "Missouri Republic" for 100 men to ascend the Missouri River, asking applicants to apply to him or to "Major Andrew Henry, near the Lead Mines in the County of Washington."

Thus, began the "Ashley-Henry Men", whose ranks included such legendary men as Jedediah Smith, Jim Bridger, David Jackson, Tom Fitzpatrick, Mink Fink, William and Milton Sublette, James Clyman and Hugh Glass.

Ashley and Hendry had met and planned their venture at Potosi. Henry had come Missouri about 1800 and in the summer of 1809, went up the Missouri River with the first fur-trading expedition of the Missouri Fur Company.

Returning to Missouri, he mined in Washington County and met William H. Ashley, a Virginia

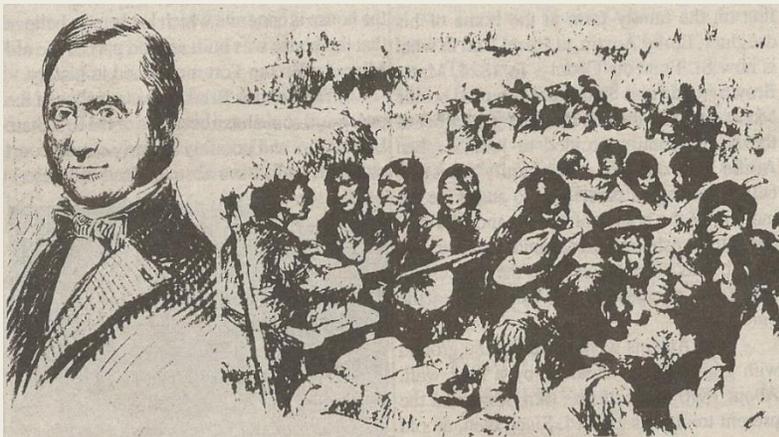
emigrant who was a lead miner and gunpowder manufacturer at Potosi.

Ashley entered the business work in St. Louis as was elected Missouri's first Lieutenant Governor in 1820 and from there joined his business acumen with the field experience of Henry to begin expeditions that over the next four years were to bring the Rocky Mountain fur trade to its peak.

Their company originated the rendezvous system of fur trading and as they worked, the mountain men explored the central Rockies, the Tetons and the South Pass, opening the "Way West" through which the great Overland Trail was later to pass. Henry returned in 1824 to his mines at Washington County near Palmer, where he died in 1833.

Ashley amassed a fortune in the fur-trade, served in Congress from 1831 to 1837, and died near Boonville in 1838, where his grave now rests on a bluff overlooking the rolling waters of the Missouri River – the "Wide Missouri" up which he and Henry and their men went in opening another new chapter in the American West.

### WINNING THE WEST

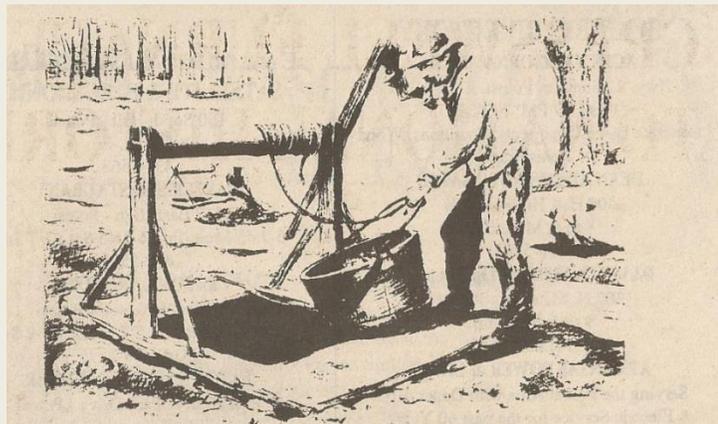


were elderly Potosi residents. Moses Austin, at left at an early lead miner and manufacturer at Potosi, was the first American to receive a grant later colony in Texas, which his son, Stephen F. Austin, established. **THE ASHLEY-HENRY MEN**, trappers in the employ of Washington Countians William H. Ashley and Andrew

Henry originated the rendezvous system in the fur trade, as they met as depicted in this sketch for their big annual trading session in the Rockies.

### RATTLEBOX DAY IN THE TIFF FIELDS

were captured by eminent American Artist O.E. Berninghause in sketches and paintings for a special 1920 publication by the DeLore Baryta Company.



## MINING MEANT MUCH

The unique geology of the Eastern Ozarks in the Washington County area left mineral deposits that drew the first settlers to the area and a mining industry that has meant much to the area down to the present day. Lead, always needed to be on the frontier, brought the first settlers, as French miners from 1720 on mined and crudely smelted the rich surface outcroppings of lead in the area. Moses Austin in 1798 turned lead mining a smelting into Missouri's first major industry, and in the 20 years to following 1804, lead produced in Washington County nearly equaled in the value the purchase price of the Louisiana Purchase.

As surface lead was exhausted, lead production turned to deep mine production in the Lead Belt area of Bonne Terre-Flat River, (Park Hills) from 1860 through the 1960's, when discovery of the Viburnum Trend shifted production to that area. Lead mining also continued in Washington County – in a surface lead “boom” in the Palmer area in the 1890's, and in the deep shafts of St. Joe Lead Company at Ebo from 1948 to 1982.

A unique mineral asset of the area is “tuff” (or barite), named by the French from their word, “Tuff”, meaning “scrap”, which they first threw aside in lead mining. As technology discovered used for the hard, white chalky ore, production in surface hand mines continued throughout central and northern Washington County from the 1860's to the 1920's, when mechanization began with washing plants and mechanized strip-mining.

The colorful days of the “Tuff Diggings” in Washington County earned it the title of “Barite Capitol of the World”, as the mineral was used in pigments, face powders, medical uses and chocolate coatings. The final major use was for the “mud” in oil-well drilling. Although deposits of “tuff” still remain, production has declined in recent years in the face of imports and the decline of oil exploration drilling which made such heavy use of the ore.



Surface mining of iron was begun in Washington County as early as 1823, when the Springfield Iron Furnace was opened on Furnace Creek and zinc was also mined in later years near Irondale.

Discovery of rich underground deposits of iron in northern Washington County in the 1960's led to the development of St. Joe Mineral's Pea Ridge Mine, which still remains in production as the nation's only underground iron mine.

## **FRENCH WERE FIRST TO MAKE THEIR MARK**

The area of Washington County is sometimes referred to as the “Old Settlement Area” of Missouri – a region encompassing much of the earliest activity by European settlers in the Mississippi Valley.

Many waves of immigrations brought new life and new development to the area – but the French were first, and their colorful and historic history – and names – continue to color the area today.

French missionaries, explorers, tappers and traders moved down the mighty Mississippi in the late 1600’s – mostly from Canada. Reports from the Indians of mineral wealth in the land – of lead and possibly gold and silver – let them inland to what was to become Washington

County. Missionaries Gravier and LeSeur, in 1700 and 1701, mention lead in the area in their reports to their superiors. By 1712, Crozat, under a charter from Louis XIV, began mineral explorations.

The Illinois-Missouri country of the “Louisiana Purchase” came under the government of “New France”, or Canada, and French settlements grew on the east bank of the river. From here, Claude DuTisne set out in 1714, crossing an old Indian trail across Washington County and returning with iron ore samples. LaMotte Cadillac, Governor of Louisiana, in 1715 discovered lead fields in the area.

The earliest Missouri activity centered around the area later to encompass Old Mines and later Mine Au Breton, or Potosi. Sieur de Renaudiere in 1719 moved down the Meramec and Big River, and his report of that year of his mining operation at “Cabanage de Renaudiere” is believed to mark the beginning of a settlement in Old Mines.

The same year, 1719, major mining operations moved into the area as Philippe Francois Renault, son of prominent French iron-mining family and operating under Company of the Indies, set out from France for Upper Louisiana. He brought workmen, tools and bricks from France and slaves from the West Indies, concentrated his operations in what is now Washington County, as he worked up and down Big River, Mineral Fork and the stream “Fourche Au Renault” (Renault’s Fork), which was to bear his name on whose headwaters were later to be impounded in the Sunnen Lake of today.

Renault returned to France in 1742 – but many of his workmen remained. Whether on a seasonal basis or in permanent settlements, documentary evidence has not yet proven, but mining continued. A wagon trail was hacked to the Mississippi bank, and the surface-mined lead was hauled to the river on two-wheeled “chariots”.

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When France gave up her American territories in 1763, the French began a heavier migration into the Spanish-held territory on the west bank of the Mississippi, rather than remain in the English territory on the east bank.

In 1763, a French hunter, Francis Azor, called the “The Breton” because of his birthplace in Brittany, discovered a rich surface outcropping of lead ore while on a bear hunt in the creek valley later to become Potosi. The “strike” drew other miners into the mines, the village and along the creek which were all later named for the Breton – Mine Au Breton - a rich mining site later to be taken under a Spanish Grant by Moses Austin.

A French trading post – St. Louis – was established in 1764 further up the Mississippi. Americans, under Spanish Grants and later under the American territories, were to lead a stream of steady immigrants into the area. But the area was to remain predominantly French for many years and the French families gradually moved away from the river and settled predominantly in the area of present day, Old Mines. In the area of the mining fields which had brought them into “Louisiana”.

Here for 200 years, descendants of the hardy French pioneers repainted a rich culture of French language, lore, music and customs of pioneer French family names and unique “joie de vie”.

Researchers as early as the 1930’s were to begin on the historic French culture of the areas and by the 1980’s the Old Mines and surrounding areas were regarded as the “last bastion” of this unique French culture in the Midwest.

Summer celebrations, seminars and research sessions signaled a new-found pride in the French heritage and friends and descendants began to enjoy a new French language of the area, the “Guignolee”, and the “charivari” and the “boo-yaw”, - and the rich legacy of French family names and place names which still mark the area.

The French had been the first to enter and settle his new land – and they were proud to be the “last” to retain the heritage of the homelands they had left 250 years ago - and to pass it on to new generations yet to come.

## **TRAIL OF TEARS PASSING THROUGH WASHINGTON COUNTY**

One hundred fifty-two years ago, the United States government implemented the forced removal of 15,000 Cherokee Indians from southeastern United States. The trek, which came to be known as the Trail of Tears, began in June 1838, at Rattlesnake Spring, Tennessee and ended March 1839 at Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

The Cherokee migration followed more than one route. The first group nearly 3,000 Indians left

in Spring by boat and followed the Tennessee, Ohio, Mississippi and Arkansas rivers to what is now Oklahoma. Removal of the rest of the Indians was postponed until fall because of the heat, disease, lack of food and drought caused hardship and death. In October 1838, 13,000 Cherokees divided into 13 contingents departed along an overland route through Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri and Arkansas to Indian Territory. Because of the severity of the winter and lack of proper food, clothing and medical care, more than 1,600 died. The total number of deaths is estimated at 4,000 – one fourth of the Cherokee Nation.

Points of historical interest can leave hardly an impression upon a carefree immature mind. Of little consequence to an eight or ten-year-old is the legend that the dusty road bed in which bare feet spews scorching hot slit between the toes was a century earlier the desolate route of doom to a great number of Cherokee Indians as they cut a map into the Missouri Landscape.

With interest renewed in compiling data on the infamous historical incident, some few residents are now endeavoring to recall the legends of what occurred nearly a century and a half ago, especially individuals who have knowledge of the heritage of a given region unique unto its own perimeter.

Extensive memory searching is essential to recall yarns passed down verbally as diluted versions of the once vividly portrayed bedtime stories. Visits by neighbors after completion of daily chores provided many youngsters only entertainment until they dozed easily by the flickering fire or were too frightened to sleep depending upon the particular story, some of which may be retrieved from memories involving family or personal significance.

The Trial of Tears stories had their varying versions, as does any tale often repeated. In south-central Missouri rumors of massacres, scalping and numerous barbaric acts supposedly initiated the subsequent Cherokee trek to Government specified reservations.