

The Devil's Backbone

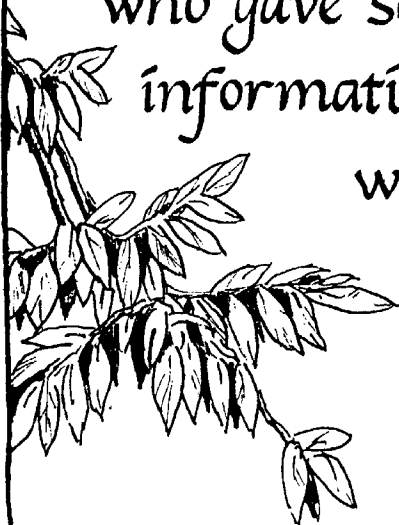
*and Other Fascinating Facts from a
Portion of Western Independence and
Eastern Kansas City Missouri
xx by Kathleen Tuohey xx*



The Devil's Backbone

by Kathleen Tuohey

I dedicate this book to all those long ago settlers of this area and to all those who gave so freely of their time and information. I couldn't have done it without you. - K.T.



Artwork by C.L. Johnson 1991

BACK, BACK, IN TIME (OVER A CENTURY AND A HALF)

This is an oral and general history of a portion of the Independence-Kansas City area from Wilson Road on the north to Raytown Road on the south (the Devil's Backbone), - the very Western edge of Independence. Also included is the Leeds area of Kansas City. (see map)

RESEARCHED BY: Kathleen Tuohey

FROM: Memorial Day 1989 to Memorial Day 1990

Personal Statement by Kathleen Tuohey as to the reason she researched this area:

"After Memorial Day 1989, I volunteered to help clean up the old Pitcher Cemetery at 33rd and Blue Ridge Blvd., Independence, Missouri. It was terribly overgrown with scrub, wild grapevine, poison ivy and poison oak, etc. Many of the markers were broken or missing. While working at the cemetery, people would drop by and tell me interesting things about the area around the cemetery. I became interested in finding out more about the lives of the people that lived so long ago and were buried in that old cemetery. I went to libraries. I interviewed people that were raised in the area. I talked to descendents of people that had been from the area. From there it just kept growing.

My goal was to find out all that I could about the general area, complete the cleanup and restoration of the Pitcher Cemetery and have a re-dedication ceremony there for Memorial Day 1990. I started the project near Memorial Day 1989 and the cleanup and restoration was well along to completion on Memorial Day 1990. We re-dedicated the cemetery Sunday, May 27."

The numbers in front of each section that follows match that same number on the attached map of the area.

South from Wilson Road

(1) Stone Arch Bridge over 15th Street (constructed of native fieldstone). (15th Street was later named Truman Road, after Harry Truman became President). At the time this bridge was built, it was the largest arch west of the Mississippi. There is a plaque at the center of the top of the bridge on Blue Ridge Road, on the E side, that says:

Built By
Forrester-Swenson
Construction Co.
Oscar Koehler
County Surveyor

A plaque on the West side of the arch of the bridge when you are on 15th Street, says:

Blue Ridge
Road
1906

Blue Ridge is sometimes called Blue Ridge Road and sometimes called Blue Ridge Boulevard, depending on the year you are referring to. It was Blue Ridge Road from Wilson Road S to the Old Independence-Westport Road. Blue Ridge Boulevard ran S and then E from Independence-Westport Road. It was built on the crest between the Little Blue and the Big Blue. Building houses on that boulevard was "the thing to do", if you could, because this area was so high that the view from there was all the way to downtown Kansas City and you could see the skyscrapers - most especially at night you could see the Power and Light Building's lighted, changing color, dome.

Blue Ridge Road, or Blvd., starts at Wilson Road on the N and ends in Raytown. This was a dirt road for many years.

Blue Ridge Cutoff was built approximately 1930.

(2) The large rock house on West side of Blue Ridge Road at arch bridge was the Sell's house. Their daughter's house was the rock house on the East. The elder Sell's market was in the building across from their house on the East.

(3) The Jackson County Animal Protective Association was at the rock house at 20th and Blue Ridge Road in the 30's (the Miller family ran it at one time). The kennels are still to the south of the house.

(4) Across from the Animal Protective Association was Kline's Feed Store that became Kline's Auction House and then a western night club and an antique auction house. This building was torn down in 1990.

(5) Log cabin on the ridge, W side, near 23rd St. belonged to Emily Lee (Gossett) Robertson and her husband at one time. She was one of the Gossett family that lived in the Old Plantation House. Emily Lee was born September 17, 1863 and died September 29, 1961 and is buried in Elmwood Cemetery. Property is now owned by the Silvey family. This log cabin was built in 1834.

(6) There was a night club near the northwest corner of 23rd and Blue Ridge Road in the 20's and into the 40's. It was called the Question Mark. It was two or three stories high and was pretty elite for the times, but later acquired a bad reputation. It burned to the ground in about the late 1940's.

(7) The small white church building to the south of 23rd St. was Ikenberry's Grocery Store. The family lived in the house to the south of the store .

(8) The little white building just north of the Blue Ridge Market, at 27th and Blue Ridge, was the Shawver's Grocery Store owned by the Shawver family. They still live in a house behind the store.

