

News, Updates, & More



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FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

Prior newsletters and other family genealogy information is found on the Varner Family website.

<http://brucevarner.com/VarnerGenealogy.htm>

Some of the family information in last month's newsletter has been corrected (I had said my knowledge of Berry and Newton family history was lacking). Those updates appear in the Questions/News section below.

Here is an introduction to a small Missouri book publisher. I think that many might be interested in their books, whose subject matter is Missouri Ozarks history. Lens & Pen Press publish a handful of books that are well written and insightful. The subject of these books include those areas of Missouri where our families settled. One of their books is cited several times in the article below. Their web site can be found at: <http://www.dammingtheosage.com/>

QUESTIONS / NEWS

Q: Vivian Bruce Kessler added and corrected some info from the last newsletter:

....A couple of notes I made after reading your most recent Varner newsletter: In my tree I show Rachel Jenkins born possibly May 1806 at Claiborne County TN. She had two children with Israel Newton Sr....

Probate records from Family History Library film No. 0941766 shows David Musick appointed administrator of Israel Newton....(Sr.) estate 26 Aug 1839 by Miller County Missouri court.]

Nancy A Newton (1837-21 Feb 1866) who married Milton H Stapp....

Israel Newton Jr (1839-1917)....

John J Denton (abt. 1821 in Montgomery County, TN., d. 27 Nov 1864) married both Sarah Ann Newton and Catherine Musick. John Denton married Sarah Ann Newton (1824-1850), who was a daughter of Israel Newton Sr. and Sarah Musick (1791-1836). John J. Denton also married Catherine Musick (1819-?) who was daughter of David Musick (1790-1847) and Nancy ? (1792-1844)

A: Thanks for the information Vivian!

In reference to John Denton, I know that wife Sarah was enumerated with John in 1850. In 1860 Nancy Ann Varner is

enumerated with John Denton and only his children, as a domestic. John married Catherine sometime later in 1860. John then enlisted for the Union in 1863, and was killed in late 1864. He is buried in the Springfield, MO. National Cemetery. His widow Catherine applied and received a pension for John in 1866. In 1870 Catherine is enumerated as head of household in Knob Noster, MO. with John's still minor children.

Another thing that this information brings to light, is the fact that since John Denton remarried in 1860, he might not have retained Nancy Ann Varner to care for the children. That would mean Nancy Ann may have lived elsewhere by the start of the Civil War in 1861?

George Varner of Missouri Direct Line DNA

I was able to meet with Janice Varner Ortner of Dallas County, and she submitted DNA samples. This is great news, as we have not yet been unable to connect the Varner's of Dallas County with the George Varner of Missouri line.

We shall see if results provide leads to prove or disprove the connection!

Riggs/Varner Connection

Nothing this month.

The Osage River

Previous monthly newsletters have had articles about Miller County and Camden County history. This month we will discuss one of the main reasons people settled in these two counties, the Osage River. Understanding the river and how humans have interacted with this river can be helpful in understanding the people who lived along and near its banks.

The Osage River has its beginnings in South eastern Kansas. This area in Kansas is the headwaters of the Marais des Cygnes¹, Little Osage, and Marmaton rivers. These three rivers travel in an easterly direction until they meet in Vernon County, Missouri to form the Osage River. The Osage continues to travel generally east into the central Missouri Ozark Plateau. It receives water from many rivers and streams, until it finally flows into the Missouri River, some 276 miles² later.

Coming from Kansas, none of the three rivers that create the Osage River are spring fed.³ This means that for water to flow into the beginning of what is the Osage River in Vernon County, its initial volume of water is solely based upon

rains. As it meanders through Missouri and into the Ozark region, rivers and streams fed by spring waters become more plentiful.



The three initial river sources for the Osage can dry to a trickle. There is only a relatively small difference in elevation change from its beginning to end. This slow change in elevation created a river that is fraught with sandbars, sharp bends, and spots of low water level. Commercial usage of the river have always been challenging.

The first known occupants of the Osage River basin were the Osage Indians. The tribe was first mentioned by Marquette and Joliet during their exploration from New France (Canada), down the Mississippi River valley in 1673. Although the French explorers did not

¹ In 1917 Kansas Legislature changing the name from Osage, to Marais des Cygnes. While it had locally been called both over the years, Kansas did not want a Missouri River to be so named in Kansas! 50 years after the Civil War ended.....

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osage_River

³ Damming The Osage by Leland & Crystal Payton, 2012, Lens & Pen, Springfield, MO., page #24

themselves venture up the Missouri River, to the Osage, Illinois tribes along the Mississippi talked of the Osage.⁴

Andre Penicaut, another Frenchman made several trips up the Mississippi River, starting in 1699. He notes that just in the few years since Marquette and Joliet had first explored the Mississippi, numerous missionaries and trappers were living with Indians along the Mississippi. It is feasible that some of these Europeans might have by this time travelled west to cross paths with the Osage, along the river of the same name.

The first recorded direct contact with the Osage Indian came from Ettienne de Viniard, Sieur de Bourgmont. A Frenchman who was married to the daughter of a Missouri Indian chief. In 1714 he was commissioned by the French government “to conduct an expedition to provide a detailed description of the route from the mouth of the Mississippi up the Missouri as far as he could travel.”⁵ In his well-written accounts, Bourgmont described the Osage Indians who lived south of the Missouri River, and in the watershed area of the Osage River.

In 1723 Charles DuTisne established Ft. Orleans, on the Missouri River at the mouth of the Grand River near present

day Brunswick, MO.⁶ Commissioned by the Mississippi Company (a French company intent on exploiting the resources of the Missouri River Valley and establishing a trade route with the Spanish to the southwest).⁷ During this time period French trappers made footholds throughout the area for the fur trade.

While small temporary camps of the Osage people were located in several places, the permanent villages were located around the confluence of the Marais des Cygnes , Little Osage, and Marmaton rivers.

In 1762 the Treaty of Fontainebleau ceded all the land west of the Mississippi from the French to the Spanish. French traders however, continued to be the go-betweens with the Indians.⁸

In 1795 “Fort” Carondelet was built near the Osage villages. The fort was in reality a trading post. Built by Don Renato Augusto Chouteau.⁹

In 1803 the Louisiana Purchase brought all the lands of Louisiana under ownership of the United States. In 1804 Lewis and Clark began their Corps of Discovery to the west coast. Around the

⁴ Damming The Osage by Leland & Crystal Payton, 2012, Lens & Pen, Springfield, MO., page #29

⁵ <https://mdc.mo.gov/conmag/1995/08/lewis-clark>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Orleans

⁷ <https://mdc.mo.gov/conmag/1995/08/lewis-clark>

⁸ Damming The Osage by Leland & Crystal Payton, 2012, Lens & Pen, Springfield, MO., page #32

⁹ Damming The Osage by Leland & Crystal Payton, 2012, Lens & Pen, Springfield, MO., page #28

time of their return in 1806, a less remembered exploration, that of Zebulun Pike began. His path travelled up the Osage River.

Although by this time trappers were familiar with the Osage River basin, Pike was the first to record a journal of the area. Pike's journal records that on the 26th of July, 1806¹⁰ his river expedition entered the Osage River from the Missouri.

Pike's day by day journal, while not rich in detail about the landscape, does have mention of several observations.

On 31st of July (Thursday) Pike writes:

"We embarked early, and passed several rapids pretty well. Dined with the Indians. Two of them left us in the morning for the village, and they all had an idea of doing the same, but finally concluded otherwise.¹¹ One of the Osages who had left the party for the village, returned and reported that he had seen and heard strange Indians in the woods. This we considered as merely a pretext to come back. I this day lost my dog, and the misfortune was the greater, as

we had no other dog who would bring anything out of the water: this was the dog Fisher presented to me at Prairie de Cheins. Killed three deer and one turkey. Distance 18 miles."¹²

This particular Pike campsite, used on July 31st and August 1st is interesting because it is located in Miller County near where our Berry, Newton, Riggs, and Varner families would come to be 54 years later.

Researches place this specific camp site as along the river, approximately a mile before reaching what is now Capps Landing.¹³ Because of rain, the party stayed in this camp for two nights. Pike goes on to say:

1st Of August (Friday)

"It having rained all night, the river appeared to have risen about six inches. We spread out our baggage to dry, but it was continuing to rain, by intervals, all day, the things were wetter at sundown than in the morning. We rolled them up, and left them on the beach. We sent out two hunters in the morning, one of whom killed three deer; all the Indians killed three more – Total six."

¹⁰ The Southwestern Journals of Zebulun Pike, edited by Hart & Hulbert, 2006, University of New Mexico Press, page #76

¹¹ The Pike expedition had several Osage Indians among them. These Osage had been bartered for from another Indian tribe, & were to be returned to the Osage, at their headwater villages, as a sign of friendship.

¹² The Southwestern Journals of Zebulun Pike, edited by Hart & Hulbert, 2006, University of New Mexico Press, page #78-79

¹³ Ibid, page #79

Progress this following day was short, but this next camp location is very, very interesting.

2nd of August (Saturday)

"The weather cleared up. The loading being spread out to dry, Dr. Robinson, myself, Bradley, Sparks, and Brown went out for a hunt. We killed four deer; the Indians two. Having reloaded the boats, we embarked at 5 O'clock, and came two miles. The river rose in the last twenty-four hours, four inches."

The exact spot of this campsite for the night of August 1st is not mentioned by researches specifically. Likely because it was so near the previous night camp. But if you look at a map, the spot is likely to be at or very near Berry Island. How is that for history!

August 3rd the expedition travelled the remaining distance through Miller County.

August 4th & 5th encamped again due to rain, was some three miles above what is now Bagnell Dam. The only mention of note was in Pike's journal for the 5th, where he stated that during a tour of the surrounding land, he stepped so close to a large rattlesnake, that he moved the serpent. He said he was lucky as it coiled but did not strike. The river also rose another thirteen inches during this period.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid, page #80-81

In what is now Camden County, on August 6th the expedition left the Osage Indians and a couple of the explorers ashore at Horseshoe bend, to navigate overland and meet up with the crew later upstream.

7th of August (Thursday)

"Not being detained by the Indians, we are for once enabled to embark at a quarter past five o'clock. The river having fell, since yesterday morning, about four feet, we wish to improve every moment of time previous to its entire fall. We proceeded extremely well, passed the Saline River on the east and encamped opposite La Belle Roche on the west shore. This day we passed many beautiful cliffs on both sides of the river, saw a bear and wolf swimming the river. I employed myself part of the day in translating into French a talk of General Wilkinson's to the Cheveux Blanche¹⁵. Distance 21 miles."¹⁶

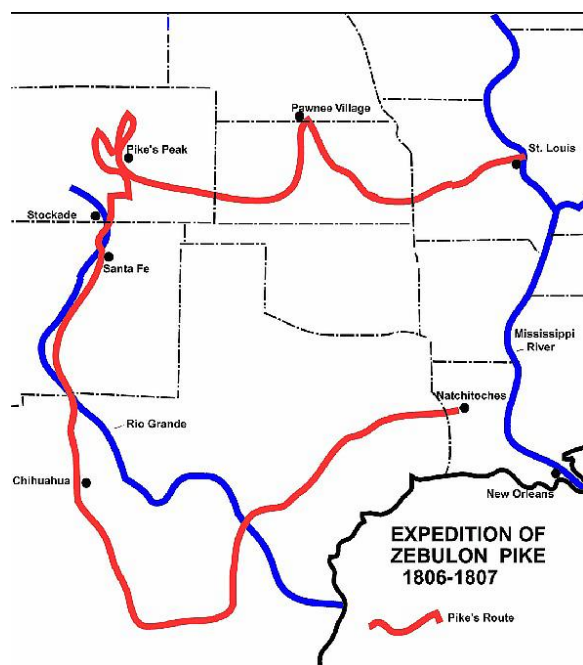
Camps for August 8th and 9th continued to follow progress through what is now Camden County at the rate of 21 miles and 25 miles respectively. Generally the

¹⁵ A Standard History of Kansas And Kansans by William E. Connelley, 1918 Chicago, page #228
<http://www.ksgenweb.org/archives/1918ks/v1/ch5p1.html>

¹⁶ The Southwestern Journals of Zebulon Pike, edited by Hart & Hulbert, 2006, University of New Mexico Press, page #81

only transcription of note occurred on the 9th when the expedition successfully picked up the Osage Indians and party members who had proceeded overland earlier.

Pike's expedition went on to visit the Osage villages. From there his party continued on through the southwest. His most lasting discovery is Pikes' Peak in Colorado. While the Lewis & Clark expedition is now more well known, at the time, Pike's exploits were released sooner and were more important to the public. It resulted in immediate popularity of attempts to establish trade routes with Mexico in Santa Fe.



In 1808 the Osage Indian tribes signed a treaty at Ft. Osage. In that treaty the Osage, because of pressure from other encroaching tribes and Europeans, gave up possession of all lands east of a

north/south line that had Ft. Osage as its divider. That treaty allowed them to remain in their traditional villages at the headwaters of the Osage, but not further east. But by the treaty of 1825, Osage gave up all lands in the new state of Missouri. For several years, the Osage, who did not fully understand what they were giving up, continued to venture into the old hunting grounds of the Osage basin. But for all intent and purposes, the day of the native American in Missouri was over.

The river itself was never reliable for commercial transportation. Ever changing water levels and the very sharp bends caused many problems. Early as 1839 the Missouri Legislature attempted to deepen the channel.¹⁷

From Navigating the Osage River in Missouri: 1839-1926, by Pat Pollock:

“North St. Louis Island is situated about 40 miles upstream from the mouth of the Osage River in Miller County, Missouri. It was named for the first boat to ascend the Osage. The voyage of the North St. Louis began in St. Louis in July of 1837 but was interrupted when the steamer grounded on the gravel bar that bears its name. The water level dropped rapidly, and soon the boat was sitting high and dry, six feet above the water's edge,

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osage_River

where it remained until spring rains brought enough water to float it once again. Thus began the century-long adventure of steam boating on the Osage River. Navigating the river's tight bends and numerous shoals remains a challenge to this day.¹⁸

The report associated with the 1839 first look at making the Osage River navigable, state the following:

"...December 20, 1840, 25 shoals and rapids were counted in the 58-mile stretch between Osceola and Warsaw, 30 in the 63-mile distance from Warsaw to the mouth of the Niangua, and 43 from there to the mouth of the Osage 108 miles downstream. These hazards were usually adjacent to islands where the channel narrowed and the water level dropped to less than one foot in dry seasons.

...On February 14, 1855, the Missouri legislature passed the General Assistance Act, providing \$50,000 for improvements to the Osage, starting at the mouth and extending to Osceola. The counties forming the Osage River Association assigned their rights to the state. The legislature divided the river into three districts and appropriated the

funds to each District Commissioner. With this funding and systematic approach, efforts were increased in dredging, snagging, and constructing rock wing dams and training walls to back water up over the shoals. As a result, navigation increased substantially, and by 1856, twelve steamboats were operating exclusively on the Osage River between the mouth and Osceola 200 miles upstream.

...by an Act of Congress on March 3, 1871.... for the first time, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers was responsible for snagging, dredging, and construction on the Osage River"¹⁹

From the start, there were complaints from all sides about changes made to the river. Some indications from the riverboat captains that the "improvements" down through the years even made the river more dangerous!

Fights and underfunding continued, while improvements to the river were negligible until the need for water commerce on the Osage had passed.

In the 1920's, two Kansas City promoters, Walter Cravens and Ralph Street, with help from the Union Electric company, were about the change the

¹⁸ Navigating the Osage River in Missouri: 1839-1926, Article by Pat Pollock, 1999

¹⁹ Ibid

face of the Osage River forever. Bagnell Dam.

The proposed Lake of the Ozarks (Then called Osage Lake) was not then, nor by some now thought to be a good idea. Bagnell Dam was finished in 1931 and Truman Dam in 1979.

The book "Damming The Osage", referenced several times in this article, provides a complete history of these changes to the Osage River. It is must reading for anyone who is interested in the river both before and after the life altering changes to the area that both the Bagnell and Truman dams have created.

As an added feature, below are some original water distances between each location and the mouth of the Osage River, where it flows into the Missouri.

Osceola - 229 river miles
Warsaw – 171 river miles
Mouth of Niangua River - 108 river miles
Tuscumbia - 66.1 river miles
Kings Bluff Access - 60.5 river miles

Osage-Tavern Access - 50 river miles
St. Thomas Ferry Access - 34 river miles
Pikes Camp Access - 20.4 river miles
Bonnot's Mill Access - 2.2 river miles

2018 Varner/Newton/Williams Reunion

This year's family reunion is set and will occur on Saturday, May 26th, 2018. The event will again be held in Macks Creek:

Macks Creek Baptist Church
Fellowship Hall
Macks Creek, MO. 65786

Opening at 10:00am with folks arriving before lunch. Because of travel, people often begin to leave the event about 3:00pm. Hope to see many people this year! Last year participation was down somewhat. Let's get this year back up to a larger number!

Waiting for spring!
Bruce Varner
