

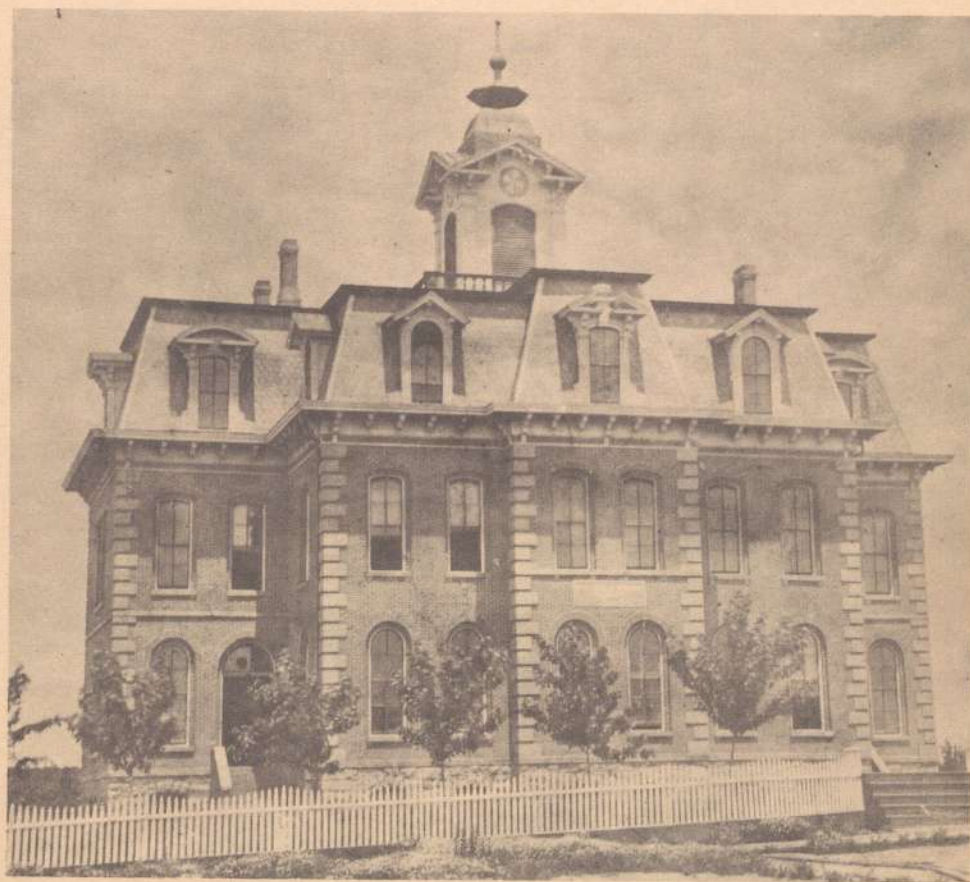
A Bicentennial View of
Phelps County, Missouri

By

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and

Lawrence O. Christensen



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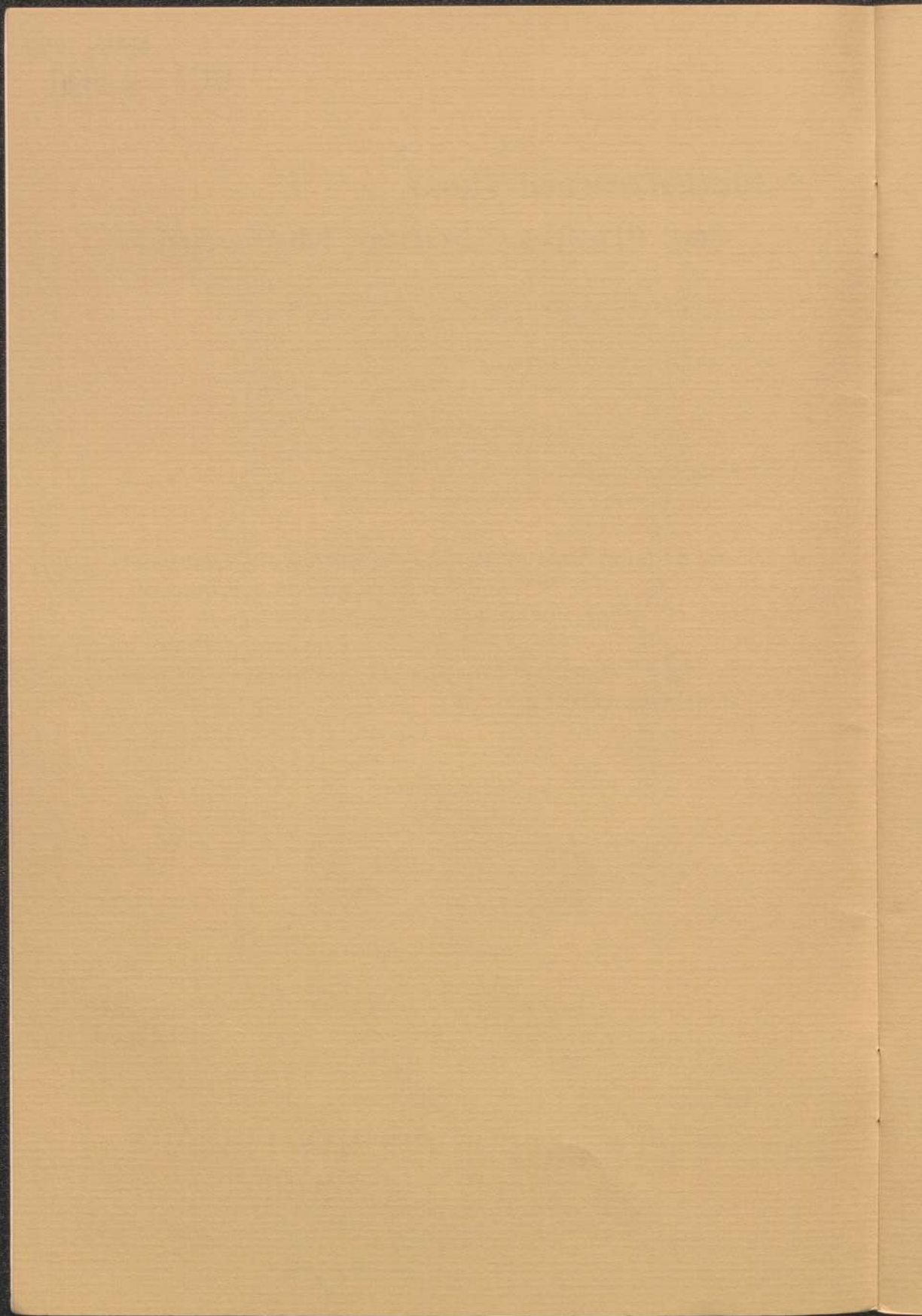
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*A Bicentennial View
of Phelps County, Missouri*

Sept., 1976

By Donald B. Oster, Assistant Professor of History, and Lawrence O. Christensen, Associate Professor of History, with the assistance of Thomas R. Beveridge, Professor of Geology and Geological Engineering, and Lance Williams, Assistant Professor of History, all members of the University of Missouri - Rolla American Revolution Bicentennial Committee

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A Bicentennial View of Phelps County, Missouri

1776. As of the year of the Declaration of Independence that piece of planet earth which was to become Phelps County, Missouri, consisted of a 677 square mile block of territory some thirty-six miles long and twenty-seven miles wide at its extreme. Members of the Shawnee Indian nation lived there, at both Maramec Spring, which the Shawnees called Big Spring, and at the mouth of the Little Piney where it flows into the Gasconade River. Periodically, the more numerous Osage Indians claimed the area as part of the eastern fringe of their hunting grounds. Earlier Mound Builder civilizations had left their ceremonial grounds but no other knowledge or evidence of their existence.

Probably no more than one hundred Indians lived in the area in the eighteenth century. Virtually, if not literally, the natural resources lay untouched. Forest and thicket covered all but perhaps eight thousand acres. Unwooded areas consisted of five small prairies sprinkled within the upland forest. The primeval forest had evolved over a several thousand year period following the last Ice Age. One of those glaciations had crept as close as modern Jefferson City before it had started to recede. For a time the area immediately south consisted of a treeless tundra, but with the glacier's recession a complex of living things evolved, including the forest itself.

A person stepping under the foliage umbrella would have found white, black, and post oak, blackjack, sycamore, walnut, hickory, pine, cedar, maple, elm, hackberry, along with buckeye, ash, wild cherry, redbud, dogwood, and even the now rare chestnut. In season there were all kinds of nuts, along with wild blackberry, raspberry, dewberry, strawberry, grapes, plums, pawpaws, and watercress in the streams. A variety of game existed, as well as freshwater fish. The Indians lived on these foods, moving to take advantage of animal habits and plant food cycles. At times they practiced a small amount of agriculture, raising beans, squash, and maize to augment their hunter-gatherer activities. And they domesticated the turkey.

Topographically the area consisted of forested uplands interlaced with valleys carrying clear and narrow streams; springs and caves notched the land. Annual rainfall averaged forty inches. Silting occurred over time, producing fertile but narrow land in the valleys. The hilltops of the area's southern border reached 1350 feet above sea

level. The lowest point, 630 feet, was on the Gasconade in the northwest corner of the future county. A forested ridge rising up to twelve hundred feet was the site of future Rolla.

The area had two watersheds, one created by an east-west ridge upon which the future railroad would run, and another produced by a north-south ridge running through the center. The latter watershed flowed into the Meramec River to the southeast. Streams in this watershed included the Little Dry Fork, Big Dry Fork, Norman Creek, and even future Rolla's Burgher Branch. The stream flow of the rest of the land moved north and west into the Gasconade. These streams included the Little Piney, South Spring Creek, Mill Creek, Beaver Creek, Tick Creek, Camp Creek, Lanes Ford, and the Bourbeuse River.

So much for demographic, geographical, topographical, and ecological characteristics of the future Phelps County in 1776. Nature in its normal state abounded. Of course where mankind lives it can be assumed that the natural state has been disturbed. Even the Indian occasionally set fire to the forest in order to drive out game. He periodically overhunted a species. Nevertheless the natural resources essential to the Indians' survival--the wood, the fish, the clear water, the minerals, the wildlife, the whole complex ecology--were there.

Only when the European made contact with the area did he call it savage, unordered, wilderness, something to be subdued, transformed, used. Prior to 1776 the area had been penetrated by European explorers, military personnel, and the trapper-hunters, but no non-Indian had become a permanent resident. Thanks to the seventeenth century explorations of Marquette and Joliet, and La Salle, the French claimed the region and called it Louisiana, but in 1762 ownership, from the European perspective, changed. The French fought the Seven Years War against Great Britain. In late 1761 Spain, fearful that a British victory would upset the balance of colonial power, threw its weight to France and Austria. Great Britain promptly captured Spanish Havana and Manila. France, losing the war, anxious not to hand over Louisiana to the British, and desiring to compensate ally Spain for her recent losses, ceded Louisiana to Spain in the secret Treaty of Fontainebleau in November, 1762. As of 1776 Spain still held the area.

1777-1820. Between 1777 and 1820 little physical change occurred in the Ozark country. The forest still grew to the edge of the rivers and creeks. Wildlife still dominated, despite increased hunting and fur trapping. Few human beings lived in future Phelps County.

Administrative changes did occur. Spain transferred Louisiana back to France in the secret Treaty of San Ildefonso in 1800. Napoleon demanded the transfer because he hoped to revive the French colonial empire in America. President Thomas Jefferson learned of the arrangement, and he did not like it. Jefferson feared that French repossession of New Orleans at the mouth of the Mississippi might cause the closing of that river to American commerce. In addition, Jefferson dreamed of the United States as an agrarian utopia, and any land purchase would encourage the realization of that dream. In 1803 Jefferson instructed American negotiators to attempt to buy New Orleans plus some adjoining territory. Napoleon, by then having abandoned his plans for North American colonization, surprisingly offered all of France's land holdings west of the Mississippi, some 828,000 square miles. The United States accepted, purchasing the huge territory for \$15,000,000 or \$18.10 a square mile or 2½ cents an acre. At a cost of \$12,253.70 the future Phelps County became part of the United States of America.

Years went by before permanent settlers moved in. Although the frontier line continually edged westward, the abundance of land tended to slow down intensive development. Frontiersmen entering Missouri territory also tended to move east-west along the Missouri River or along the west bank of the Mississippi River, occupying the rich bottom lands and moving inland only after the fertile lands were gone.

Two other factors slowed settlement into Missouri. First, Indians stood in the way. But fewer in number and with less fire power, the Osage and the lesser tribes and parts of tribes, civilizations that had made the uplands and streams their homes for hundreds of generations, were pushed out of Missouri. In the 1808 treaty between the Big and the Little Osage tribes and the United States government, these Indians agreed to vacate an area north and west of the Arkansas River in present day Arkansas to a point on the Missouri River at Fort Clark (Fort Osage), just twenty miles downstream on the Missouri from present day Kansas City. Nevertheless a few Indians, including some

Shawnees, remained in the Phelps County region when the first permanent settlers arrived in 1818, but they were individuals and small bands who lingered and tried to hold on to the familiar. In the 1820s the United States government moved the main Shawnee nation from the Ohio and Kentucky regions to a reservation west of Missouri. The Indian obstacle to settlement disappeared.

The second factor discouraging rapid settlement concerned the selling of the newly obtained public domain. According to the Ordinance of 1785, public land had to be surveyed before it could be sold. Not until the establishment of the Fifth Principal Meridian in 1815-1816 at ninety degrees, fifty-eight minutes West Longitude initiated the process of survey, could land west of the Mississippi River be sold. That meridian ran from the mouth of the Arkansas where it flowed into the Mississippi, north to the Missouri River. In the process it ran a few miles west of present Potosi in Washington County. It still took time to survey the area, and sale of public land in Missouri did not begin until August 3, 1818, at Franklin in Howard County.

The first sale of public domain in future Phelps County occurred in 1826, some eight years after the first permanent settlers arrived. Those first families who arrived in 1818 simply sat or "squatted" on the land until the survey and land office reached their part of the frontier. Some early settlers viewed themselves as adventurers, but more came to this area because they thought the natural resources could be turned into a livelihood. For whatever reasons, in 1818 four families from the upper South floated rivers west and then, entering the Mississippi and then the Missouri, they rowed upstream to the Gasconade and then in to the smaller streams.

James Berry Harrison and Lovisa Voss Duncan Harrison, originally from Virginia, settled at the mouth of the Little Piney. They brought their six children with them. The following year the Harrisons had another child, Benjamin Berry Harrison, the first American child born in what would become Phelps County. The Adam Bradford family also came in 1818. Louisville had been their last stop west, but they decided to come even further. They first settled on the Little Piney and then on Spring Creek at present Relfe. John York, Jack Duncan, and John Duncan also settled in 1818. These families brought their black slaves with them.

For a brief time then, three races shared the Ozark environment. The human beings who morally owned the land were in the process of leaving, if unwillingly. The Caucasian newcomers came to physically work the land and extract its natural resources. They and others before

and after them in American society reasoned themselves into thinking that holding a third race in slavery for purposes of creating a kept labor force in a labor scarce economy amounted to a moral good. Such was the Phelps County area at the eve of Missouri statehood, which occurred in 1821.

1821-1854. By 1854 new and old settlers were using the land and resources unevenly. The residents already had overhunted some of the animal species. By that time perhaps two thousand persons lived on farmsteads, in forest cabins, and in one frontier industrial development, but settlement took time. Only sixty individuals paid taxes in 1828. Seventy-one land entries occurred between 1837, when the U.S. government survey of the area public domain had been completed, and 1840. Undoubtedly, many others lived on the land without bothering to purchase it. Clusters of people lived on the Gasconade and its tributaries. Along with subsistence agriculture practiced along the narrow river valleys, the Gasconade community also had grain and saw mills, a wool carding machine, and blacksmithing. The river and creek people also assembled huge lumber rafts made up of both dimension and plain lumber, floated them down the Big Piney to the Gasconade, and then to Saint Louis. With money in their pockets from the sale of lumber, the men and boys walked home. Another population concentration lived in the Lane's Prairie area to the northeast.

Most importantly, a population concentration was at Maramec Spring in the southeast. There the Maramec Iron Works, an industrial enterprise in the heart of the forest, daily produced several tons of iron and iron products.

Several variables came together to produce this atypical frontier activity. The growing Missouri economy pleaded for a source of iron ingots and finished iron ware and implements. In 1825 Thomas James, a prominent iron-master in Ohio, ever watchful for opportunities in the West, heard through friends that there existed in Missouri an ideal combination of natural resources at a spot one hundred miles southwest of Saint Louis. Iron ore banks, reliable, rapidly running water for a power source, abundant timber for charcoal, and limestone for flux, made up the resource combination. James and partner Samuel Massey purchased the Maramec Spring site plus an additional ten thousand acres of timber land surrounding the spring. Equipment, labor, some free and some slave, and skilled artisans were brought in. By 1829 the iron works had a capacity of nine tons of iron per day. In addition to iron ingots, the Maramec Iron Works manufactured pots, skillets, kettles, grates, flues, plowmolds, sledgehammers, and hammerheads.

A community of five hundred persons made up of Maramec Iron officials, workers, and their families resided in the immediate vicinity of the spring. Ironically, at least when the reality is compared with the popular frontier image, a significant number of the subject land's population made their living in industry. Out of character too, when compared with their living in industry. Out of character too, when compared with the American self-image of abundance, was the amount of environmental disruption and depletion which quickly occurred at Maramec Iron. In the summer months the air for miles around carried the pungent odor of burning charcoal pits. Year after year the available close-in timber for charcoal diminished, for by the 1850s the furnace consumed sixteen hundred bushels of charcoal daily. The iron ore would prove to be finite in the future.

1855-1865. Between 1855 and 1865 much of the land in the area changed from public to private hands, and the building of a railroad caused a significant alteration in the area's status. First, in 1854 the U.S. Congress passed a land law, the Graduation Act. A favorite of the Democrats, the law graduated the price of public domain downward after it had been on the market for a period of years. Much of the Phelps County land had been up for sale for more than fifteen years. This meant the purchasers could buy government land for seventy-five cents an acre instead of the usual \$1.25. Even lands only on the market for ten years, but unsold, could now be purchased for one dollar an acre. This act undoubtedly increased the area population. Admittedly, absentee land speculators bought a disproportionate amount of the land, but the law also made it easier for the small enterpriser and farmer to buy land. Now, since the minimum was eighty acres (there was no maximum), a person could purchase a farm for sixty dollars, forty dollars less than previously possible. Much of the Ozark region moved from public to private hands through the Graduation Act. Nationwide, in the eight years that it existed the law produced a sale of thirty million acres a year.

Secondly, a railroad was constructed across the county from the east. Started in 1855, its tracks had crept to between Rolla and Arlington by the end of 1865. Rolla stood as the railhead all during the Civil War.

At this juncture it should be noted that three other ingredients significant in Phelps County history are inextricably tied with the railroad. They are the actual creation of Phelps County in 1857, the official incorporation of the town of Rolla on January 25, 1861, and the Civil War, which started that same spring. The following indicates the interrelationships of these subjects in the county's history.

In the 1840s U.S. Senator from Missouri, Thomas Hart Benton, had a dream of a commercial "Passage to India," contact with the Far East by going west. In his mind this came to fruition in 1852 when an act of Congress granted to the State of Missouri public domain land to aid in the construction of two railroads across the state, one along the thirty-eighth parallel and another along the thirty-fifth somewhat more south. With this grant of land Missouri in turn granted not only a right of way for these railroads but also considerable additional lands to the companies that obtained the railway franchises. In the case of the southwest branch of the Pacific Railroad, as the thirty-fifth parallel line

was originally called, the railroad company received alternate sections (640 acres) of land amounting to ten sections on each side of the track right of way. Once the company finished construction of a segment of track, it received additional sections of land. The land being the primary source of funds for financing the construction of the railroad, the railway company immediately put it up for sale.

In 1855 the J. Stever Company became a subcontractor under the parent railroad corporation, contracting to clear and grade the right of way the thirty-one miles from Leasburg to the Gasconade River on the west. The parent railroad paid the subcontractors in land. Upon one piece of land the Stever Company built a two story house/office structure. One of the several partners in the Stever Company, thirty-seven year old Edmund W. Bishop, his confidence shaken by the national financial panic of 1857, decided he would get out of the highly speculative railroad business. He made an offer to his associates, and they accepted. Bishop exchanged his holdings in the company for sole ownership of the two story structure and considerable acreage nearby. He then sought to turn a profit by subdividing the land and encouraging the growth of a town. He offered the prospective Phelps County government fifty acres if it would locate the county seat on that land.

Before 1857 parts of future Phelps County belonged to Pulaski, Maries, and Crawford Counties. Interest existed to create an altogether new county because population concentrations distant from the various county seats wanted their local government to be closer to them. Consequently, the Lane's Prairie people and the Gasconade settlements to the north and the northwest, and the Maramec community in the southeast, complemented Bishop's hope to encourage town development along the railroad route at the point where he owned land. Bishop may very well have influenced that decision, for it matched his wishes precisely. He quickly offered the fifty acres, and the commissioners decided to take him up on the offer. Edmund Bishop's visionary town of Rolla (traditionally believed to be a corruption of Raleigh, North Carolina) became the new county's seat of government.

Within just over three years, late 1857 to January 1861, when the first railway locomotive chugged into the Rolla railhead, the site had become a rough frontier town of six hundred residents living in seventy-five houses and structures, a town complete with a soon to be built brick courthouse and a thick stone jailhouse.

The railroad also determined the location of Phelps County's second largest town, Saint James, for John Wood laid out the town of Scioto (named after an Ohio river familiar to many of the skilled iron workers

then living at Maramec Spring). But soon thereafter William James, son of Thomas James, together with James A. Dunn bought the yet to be town and changed its name to Saint James. When the first steam locomotive passed through on July 4, 1860, the James group had already constructed a platform. Later that year a store and a warehouse were constructed, but the real Saint James did not evolve until after the conclusion of the Civil War.

Rolla, however, did grow during the Civil War. Because the railhead existed at Rolla throughout the war, the town served as the terminus for supplies and troops for all the Union activities in the Southwest United States. The government built extensive warehousing facilities next to the railroad tracks, and the woods surrounding the town quickly filled up with Union troops either coming, going, or guarding the railroad from prospective Confederate threats from the west and south. Two forts, Wyman on the south and Detty on the North, existed throughout the war. Troop estimates range from twenty to sixty thousand men quartered in the immediate area during the war. Two thousand civilians also moved in to serve the military's various needs. The ecology of the region naturally suffered, for in the process of providing wood for construction, camp site clearing, and fuel, most of the timber was cut down. Within a radius of three miles of Rolla the timber was virtually eliminated. A panoramic photograph taken of Rolla in 1869 reveals a great deal. One can readily see most of the buildings in the town because only a half dozen trees stood to serve as shade.

Trenches and earthworks meandering in and around the town certainly did not contribute beauty either. Despite the dust and mud and disorder, many people must have been pleased, for Rolla was in boom time. But in reality the boom would bust. It was based on an artificial, transitory situation: the Civil War. When the war ended the troops went home; the forts and warehouses came down and became used lumber. The townspeople who remained used the lumber for the construction of a few buildings, a lot of fences, and for fuel. The 1865 fire which destroyed forty buildings, and smallpox and cholera outbreaks added to the end of war depression.

Immediately after the war Rolla reverted back to its pre-Civil War status, a railroad town of six hundred persons, sitting in the wooded uplands of the Ozarks, waiting for regional increase in population before it could grow into a trade center. From the perspective of the present, the Civil War was not critical in Rolla's history. The war amounted to an episode, and a largely unpleasant one at that. The permanent changes to Phelps County came from the turnover in the rural civilian population. Before the war, Southerners from Virginia,

North Carolina, Kentucky and Tennessee migrated into the area. By 1860 black slaves numbered 105 out of a total population of over five thousand. In the 1860 U.S. Presidential election the Southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge easily carried the county with 430 votes. Northern Democrat Stephen A. Douglas followed with almost three hundred votes. Intimidated by the presence of the thousands of Union forces during the war, many of these Southern families fled the county and never came back.

In summary, it is apparent that the southwest branch of the Pacific Railroad (the future Frisco) is the key to local history during this period. Without the railroad Edmund W. Bishop would not have been in the area with his town promotion ideas, nor would there have been a magnet of steel rails to encourage the separate settlements of the locale to try to create a new county. Nor would Saint James have been plotted. Without the railroad there would have been no reason for a great amount of government money and men to locate there even temporarily. Without the railroad most probably the Civil War would have largely passed by south central Missouri. Even some institutions which an observer would not ordinarily attribute to the influence of the railroad developed because of it. In 1862 the Catholic Church founded Saint Patrick's in Rolla in order to serve the Irish railroad construction crews and their families.

1866-1890. During the next thirty-four years limited population growth and economic development characterized Phelps County history. The county population increased to 12,636 from 5,714, a 121 percent rise. But when this is compared with the overall growth of the State of Missouri, from 475,000 to 2,679,000, a 464 percent increase, the county lagged badly. Lacking fertile agricultural land, and unable to compete with the massive industrialization and accompanying urbanization of Saint Louis and Kansas City, Phelps County grew slowly. Success, using the population and material growth criteria, passed over Phelps County.

At least proportional to its significance, however, Phelps County participated in the national Gilded Age exercise in government aid to free enterprise. Thanks partly to the grant of large amounts of United States public domain to the railroad, Phelps County changed. The railroad allowed Rolla to develop as an area trade and service center of 1,592 citizens by 1890. Rolla served as both a farm to market town and as a transfer point for incoming and outgoing people and goods moving within the national railroad system.

The Saint James site on the railroad also had a lot to do with its growth, up to six hundred inhabitants by 1890. Newburg, founded in 1883, was almost, if not quite totally, a result of railroad interests, for its central focus consisted of a railroad shop, a roundhouse, extensive yards, and "hill engines" which could boost trains traveling both on the east and the west sides of town. The boarding houses and hotels, including the present Houston House, served the needs of the railway workers. Even a great deal of the land sales in the county had direct connections with the railroad, for it continued to try to turn the federal land grant into liquid assets.

In at least two other respects federal legislation aided free enterprise. Ever since the 1850s Westerners had wanted a homestead act, literally free land, but it had never come about because the Congressmen from the slaveholding Southern states voted against it. The Southern leadership felt that the institution of slavery would not be enhanced by the creation of 160 acre family farms. With the secession of eleven states an effective barrier to the homestead legislation no longer existed, and a homestead law passed Congress in 1862. In subsequent years fully eight percent of Missouri's land changed from public to private ownership through the provisions of the Homestead Act. There is every reason to think Phelps County was fairly representative. True, a

higher than average proportion of the Phelps County land had been granted to the Frisco Railroad's forerunners, and the Graduation Act of 1854 had its impact, but counties having poor agricultural land also had a higher percent of the land remaining for potential homesteading.

Secondly, the Morrill Act also became law in 1862. Although the proposal to use federal public land to help finance schools of higher education in the disciplines of agriculture and the so called "mechanic arts" held a greater attraction to the diversified agriculturalists and the growing number of industrialists of the North and West than it would to the South, it was not as bitterly opposed as was the Homestead Act. Nevertheless, it constituted the kind of legislation desired by a political party like the Republican, committed to facilitating national economic development through federal aid, both direct and indirect. The Morrill Act provided indirect aid, in that it created schools which would teach agricultural science and the various engineering fields, all essentials for a complex economy and culture.

The Morrill Act granted to each of the various states thirty thousand acres of public domain for each senator and representative in Congress. That meant the State of Missouri received 330,000 acres. The financial benefits from this land would be used to set up a perpetual fund. The interest from the fund helped finance the various land grant colleges and universities. By the time the Missouri Legislature had agreed on the issue of where the schools of agriculture and the mechanic arts would be located, it was 1870. The University of Missouri at Columbia received the school of agriculture. The legislature stipulated that the mining region of southeast or south central Missouri should receive a school of mines and metallurgy. The county in that district guaranteeing the most land and money for the school, said the legislature, would get it. Only Iron and Phelps managed to make serious bids. Obviously desiring the school more than Iron County, Phelps County officials won the competition with a pledge of \$130,000 in bonds and land. Formal opening of the school occurred in November, 1871, in the present Rolla Building on the University of Missouri - Rolla campus. By 1890 a few hundred students had passed through the doors of the University of Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy, having taken both practical and academic subjects. Due in part to federal aid, Rolla had begun to play its role as a regional center of education.

Economic developments during the period included the continuance and acceleration of lumbering, and the development of a variety of small agricultural endeavors. But the county's major industry, ironmaking, declined and then disappeared.

Besides depleting the supply of iron ore, William James's Maramec Iron Works fell victim to a changing metal processing technology. James also attempted to relocate his industry just as the nation underwent a depression. In 1873, attempting to cope with the depletion of ore at Maramec and at the same time get closer to the railroad, James purchased eight thousand acres some ten miles west of Rolla. At a location near the Little Piney River and the railroad tracks James spent a great deal of money, nearly \$300,000, building the Ozark Iron Works, but a depression soon wiped him out. By 1878 the fifty-five year old James was bankrupt. He sold his new location to A.H. Knotwell, who attempted to make it a profitable venture, but in 1885 the last smelting occurred. The site was abandoned in 1890. Incidentally, A.H. Knotwell as well as the railroad corporation founded Newburg, for he wanted a town close by his iron works.

Between 1826 and 1875 the county's frontier industry, iron smelting and processing, exported some 300,000 tons of iron ingots and iron products. The industry's end provided early evidence, for those who wished to see it, that America's abundance had a limit, after all.

Other area resources continued to provide livelihood. The harvesting of forests went on, and railroad ties were floated along streams into the major rivers of the state. Farmers continued the slow and difficult work of creating open, tillable fields on the prairies and in the valleys. Phelps County farmers tried virtually every kind of agricultural activity that the farmers of the Midwest's more fertile areas worked with, from hog and cattle and sheep raising to field grain, fruit orchards, and vineyards. None of these enterprises proved successful enough to turn the trend in any one direction. The agrarians had yet to learn that the Ozark uplands, fat on rocks and thin on soil, could not support the pursuits of farmers in the northern part of the state.

As of 1890 the county remained overwhelmingly rural and isolated, isolated except for a few primitive wagon roads and that thin dual ribbon of railroad steel which went, figuratively at least, to everywhere. While the average population in the whole of Missouri amounted to thirty-eight people per square mile, the Phelps County population density was eighteen, fifteen if one excluded Rolla, Saint James, and Newburg. In 1890 Phelps County really had two faces, the rural, only partly agrarian, mostly timberland in the process of being cut on the one hand, and the go-getting Gilded Age town life on the other hand, with its link to the world and its variety of up-to-date services. From hotels and liveries to restaurants and confectionaries, from clockshops

and photographers to churches and schools, from saloons and carbonated bottling works to barbers and dentists, from doctors and undertakers to lawyers and bankers, this too was Phelps County in 1890.

1891-1930. During the next four decades the rural/town dualism continued, with differences peaking in the 1920s. Rural Phelps County experienced slow population growth. A 95.1 percent nation-wide increase in population, aided significantly by waves of European immigrants in the early decades of the period, had less of an impact on Missouri than on other states and territories. Missouri's population increased only 35.4 percent in the period. Phelps County only increased 21.1 percent, from 12,636 to 15,308. Phelps County continued to be a mixture of farm and forest. The 1930 population density of 22.6 people per square mile amounted to quite a bit less than the state population density of 52.5 per square mile. In 1910 sixty-five percent of the county was designated farm land, but less than half of that had been improved. The 1,950 farms averaged 143 acres each, with 64.5 acres improved. Some of the so called farm land actually consisted of cutover land which the lumber industry had handed to speculators, who in turn offered the land as potential farms. Attempted cultivation, along with the lack of tree roots, produced serious erosion. A combination of overhunting and destruction of habitat had seriously depleted the county's wildlife.

Perhaps the author of a booklet written for the Rolla Land and Investment Company in 1910 portrayed the reality closer than one might expect, given the fact that the company hoped to sell Phelps County land. In any case, the author of the booklet made no attempt to glamorize. Under the headline "Don'ts for Phelps County" the author stated, "Don't expect as good roads as in Illinois, Ohio or Indiana." Indeed, the county only had thirty-two miles of taxed roadbed in 1904. In 1911, although the State of Missouri had over thirteen thousand automobiles registered, only four came from Phelps County, three of those being from Saint James and one from Rolla. Over and above the obstacle of cost, very few individuals felt they needed one, given the lack of roads to drive them on.

The booklet went on: "Don't expect that all our land is free of stone; we have stone, but they are useful for many purposes." Then the writer concluded by directly confronting the national belief of the agricultural garden, saying, "Don't expect to find here a second garden of Eden or Paradise on Earth. If you do, you will be mistaken. Don't come here expecting to find our streams flowing with milk and honey and great beds of manna free for the gathering. Such is not the case. Our creeks

are cold, clear, spring water, that's all; and you have to work for all you get."

In contrast, Rolla grew, especially in the 1920s when it obtained three-fourths of its 130 percent increase. From 1891 to 1930 it grew from 1,591 inhabitants to 3,670. Rolla's growth occurred because of several factors. Depressed farm prices in the 1920s literally drove some agrarians to the towns and cities; others went voluntarily. Rolla, and to a degree Saint James and Newburg, continued to serve as market and service centers and as contact points with the national railway system. Also, Rolla began to acquire state and federal agencies, agencies which complemented the expertise being gathered at the University of Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy. The Missouri State Geological Survey made Rolla its headquarters in 1901. In 1920 the U.S. Bureau of Mines established a local unit, and in the following year the U.S. Geological Survey started a division. Very late in the period Rolla and Saint James began to benefit from the construction and then operation of the U.S. Highway system, for U.S. Highways Sixty-three and Sixty-six passed through Rolla and Sixty-six came through Saint James.

1931-1976. Taken as a period, the years 1931-1976 in Phelps County look different than earlier times. During these years the county increased in population at a greater rate than the nation or the state. While the United States increased from 123,077,000 to 204,765,000, a sixty-six percent increase, the State of Missouri, an out-migration state, increased 29.1 percent from 3,629,000 to 4,687,759. But Phelps County increased from 15,308 to 29,567, a ninety-three percent increase. Rolla grew 229.7 percent through natural increase, annexation, and migration to 13,571 inhabitants in 1970, compared with 3,670 in 1930.

As regards population per square mile, from 1930 to 1970 the state density rose from 52.5 to 67.8 while the national average in 1970 numbered fifty-five persons per square mile. Phelps County, in contrast, rose from 22.6 to 43.6 per square mile. Instead of having less than half of the state's population density per square mile, in 1970 the county had two-thirds the state's density per square mile.

A similar pattern is revealed when one looks at urbanization in Phelps County. While in 1970, 73.5 percent of the nation's population lived in urban places of 2,500 or more or in Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Missouri was 70.1 percent urban; sixty percent of that total lived in five urban areas--Saint Louis City and County, Jackson, Clay, Greene, and Buchanan Counties. Adding the population of Saint James (2,787) and Rolla (13,571) together, but excluding Newburg's 806 because under the Census Bureau's definition of urban it did not qualify, 16,358, some 55.3 percent of Phelps County inhabitants were urbanites. This figure does not take into account the great number of Phelps Countians who lived in the semi-rural fringes (what the local realtors call "suburban Rolla") and those who lived in the rest of the county but had primary employment in Rolla or Saint James. Nonagricultural workers constituted a considerably higher percent of the county's total work force than did the percent of urban residents.

Several explanations account for this population increase and for the increasing urbanization. One, the mechanization of farming which has brought on the literal depopulation of many northern Missouri counties has had only a modest influence on the farms of Phelps County. If anything, Phelps County farmers have learned they cannot imitate their northern Missouri counterparts. Land use is closer to what the land can reasonably support now, as compared with previously. Livestock production is an important part of the economy. This is supported by

pasturage, hay, corn, and silage crops produced in the valleys and on the prairies, and on cleared hill land. There are also vineyards.

As of 1963, 59.9 percent of the county was still forested, much of it second and third growth, the result of extensive lumbering operations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since the beginning of federal land acquisition in 1933, some 60,501 acres, 13.9 percent of the land area of Phelps County, has come under federal ownership as Clark/Mark Twain National Forest. This has taken some people off the land, but there is continued settlement in nonforested areas of the reserve. Relocation rather than literal loss of population has been the primary result. Personnel attached to the Forest Supervisor's Office in Rolla has even resulted in some small increase in the county's population.

In fact, directly and indirectly, Phelps County's population and economic growth between 1931 and 1976 have been tied to federal and state investment in the area. That large investment has been instrumental in Phelps County's pattern of development. As mentioned before, in 1920 and 1921 the U.S. Bureau of Mines and the U.S. Geological Survey established units in Rolla. Then came the U.S. Forest Service acquisitions in the 1930s, along with the work of the New Deal related Civilian Conservation Corps and other bureaus and administrations designed to put people back to work through federally sponsored public projects. This included \$298,000 of federal money spent to extend Rolla's sewers.

World War II, bringing loss of life and injury to some Phelps Countians, also brought an upsurge in the local economy. The millions of dollars spent in the construction and operation of Fort Leonard Wood in neighboring Pulaski County brought livelihoods to many. During the war the federal government actually went into the business of supplying critically needed housing for persons involved directly in the war effort. It spent \$437,000 financing the construction of some 620 houses in Rolla, including those in the Great Oaks, Green Acres, Powell's First and Second, and Murry's First Additions. Rolla's population growth from 5,141 in 1940 to 9,354 in 1950, came, more than from any other source, from United States defense dollars.

In two other major ways public money enhanced the development of the county. Interstate Forty-four, part of the multi-billion dollar highway construction program undertaken by the federal government in 1956, not only brought in money and people while it was being constructed through Phelps County; it has continued to be a major county industry, for the many motels, restaurants, and automotive

establishments provide services for thousands of travelers using the interstate each year.

Secondly, both state and federal funds have been pumped into the now present University of Missouri - Rolla and its forerunner, the University of Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy. Thanks to a combination of public and private money, and the post-World War II baby boom, higher education is a major factor in the county.

Two other more minor but nevertheless significant aspects of present Phelps County complete this historical overview. The county is now participating in a modest way in the decentralization of American industry. Perhaps one thousand persons are employed in various kinds of mass or partial mass production work; this has in fact been facilitated by the development of the national highway system as well as the railway lines already present.

And ironically, what in the nineteenth and part of the twentieth centuries was viewed as a liability by most--rocks and forests, hills and shallow streams--now is increasingly viewed as an asset, as people seek refuge from overcrowding, environmental pollution, and the general stresses of urban life. Consequently, tourism, outdoor recreation, and retirement activities are a part of the area's current complexity.

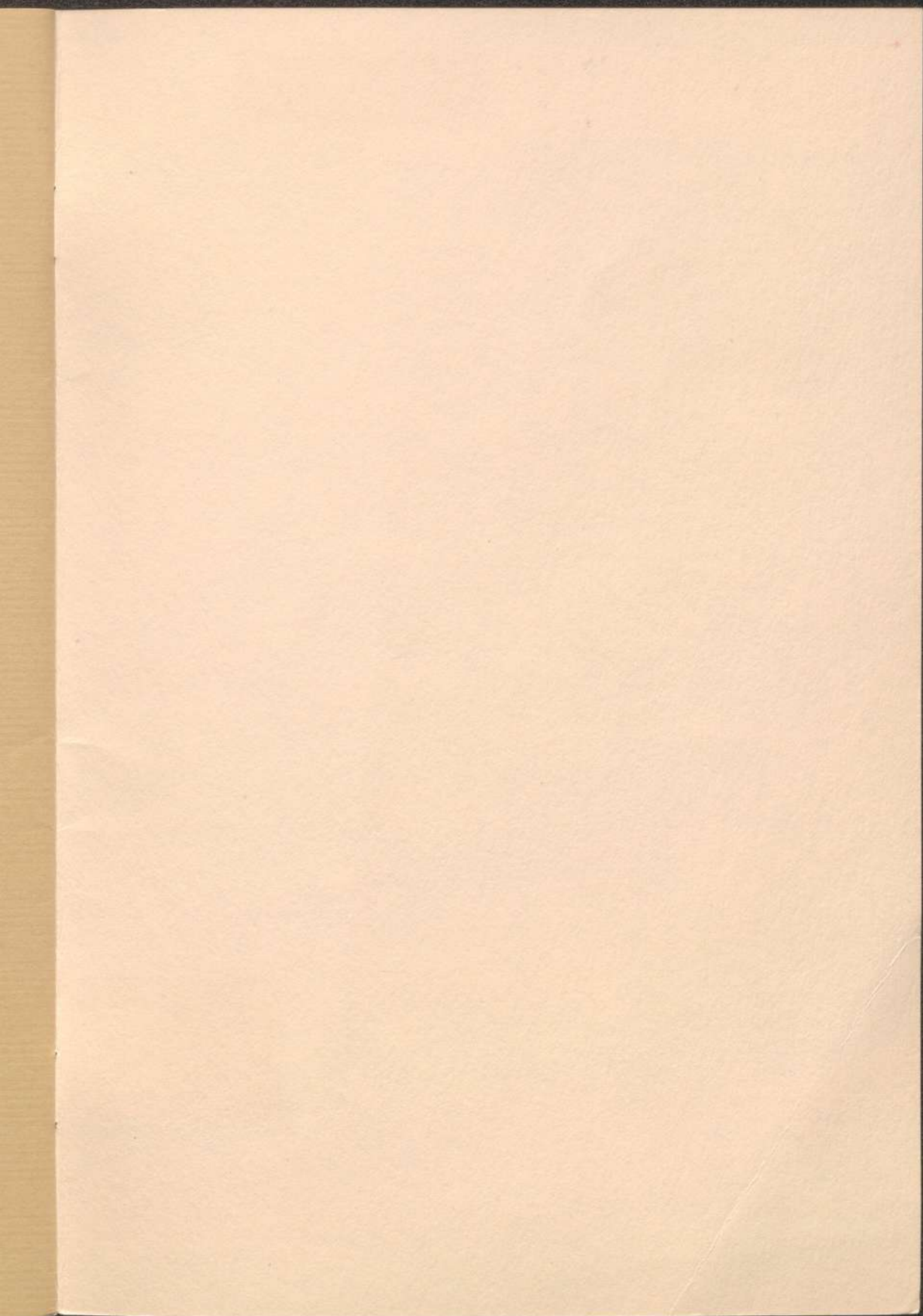
Conclusion. The above is an interpretation of what has constituted some of the important local human activities occurring during the two hundred years since the American Declaration of Independence. A lot of everyday living has gone on in two hundred years, much of it lost forever from the curious gaze of the historian. Private, individual hopes and dreams and resulting activities of course make up most of the historical totality. The private sector of life is not to be neglected and demeaned. Yet, it must be concluded that a great deal of public policy and aid have also been instrumental in the county's history. Perhaps the public contributions are so visible because the private sector had so little for so long.

Regarding progress, for most of American history Phelps County has not been a holder of the prime indicators. Population, productivity, even urbanization, when used as indicators of progress, have placed the county behind. But in a world increasingly paying in a negative way for the fruits of progress--overpopulation, increasing demands on finite resources, increasing pressure on the environment's pollution absorption capacities, elephantiasis urbanism--Phelps County still has an opportunity which many American communities no longer have. It can redefine progress and start to work for population and industrial equilibrium. It has time to work for quality instead of quantity. The ultimate irony is that Phelps County's early relative backwardness can be in the long run its ultimate asset.

Bibliographical Note

Librarian and local leader in the Phelps County Historical Society Mrs. Jesse Rucker guided the authors to appropriate material in her possession and in the Rolla Public Library. Reference librarian Mrs. Goldena Howard of the State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, provided a similar service there. The University of Missouri - Rolla Library was also used extensively. Aside from a variety of U.S. Census Bureau publications, the following are specific sources used in this study:

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