

FIRST PLACE: ELEMENTARY DIVISION

“Benjamin Holladay’s Life in Weston” ***(Weston’s beginning through Holladay’s life)***

By Grace Cogan

EARLY ON

My name is Benjamin Holladay. I was born in 1819 in Kentucky. When I was sixteen years old I ran away from home on account of a drunken father. I ended up here in quaint Weston, Missouri. My plan was to head down to Mexico but you folks nowadays probably call it Santa Fe, New Mexico.

So I settled here in Weston becoming a store clerk trading with local Indians. One day, I wrote a letter to my folks convincing them to come live here also and they gladly agreed. About a year later I was ready to be on my way again but Cousin Bela Hughes wanted me to stay. After we talked for a little while I walked outside of the house and looked at the streets of Weston realizing this town was my home. So I stayed on which was music to my folk’s ears.

WESTON’S GROWTH

In 1838 there was a war brewing, the Mormon War. I quit my job as a clerk and decided to serve as a courier for the military. When I turned twenty-one and the war had ended, I had decided to design and open a saloon. Many told me it was the first saloon Weston ever had. It was located on Thomas Street. I admit I went in there and had my fill of whiskey just like every other young man in Weston would have. In 1839 Weston’s population had grown to around 300 people. Tobacco was how most farmers made their living. We shipped the tobacco on rafts down the Missouri to be sold in Glasgow, Missouri. This was also the year I fell in love with a girl named Notley Ann Calvert. She was the prettiest gal I had ever laid eyes on. After three years of courtship I asked her to marry me.

“Pa won’t approve of us getting’ married,” she said to me. “I’m sorry.”

“That’s fine,” I said. But I wasn’t about to let her go. So one day when she was riding horses with some friends, I stole her away.

“Ben,” she said, “where are we goin’?”

“To get married,” I replied. I took her to the Justice of the Peace, Tom Weston, that very day and we were married. She would be my beloved wife until her death in 1873.

Our new home was beautiful. When we walked in, there was a red velvet carpet in the parlor. Then to the right of the parlor was the kitchen connected to the dining room. We slept upstairs and there was a good sized balcony to stand on when we felt like we needed to breathe in fresh air. Nowadays, our house is referred to as an Antebellum home, which is a house built prior to the Civil War. Notley loved our house. In the early 1840s I decided to make Weston’s finest

hotel. It would be called the International Hotel and known as the finest hotel to stay at while traveling west.

“Notley,” I said one day, “I think we should spend a night at the hotel. Those men worked on it for a long time and I think since I designed the damn building we should spend at least a night there.” She agreed.

Notley and I checked out our room and went across the street to the saloon. We ate a good sized dinner then went up to our room. I thought I did a pretty good job designing the hotel.

Soon I became the first postmaster of Weston riding and walking all over town delivering people’s mail. The post office was located on 613 Short Street. We loved Weston. This job inspired me to buy a stage line. I called it the *Holladay Overland and Express Company*. My stage line also delivered mail to seven different territories.

In 1842 I was happy to see a fellow come along by the name of Augustus (Gus) Kuntz. He founded the Weston Royal Brewery. The business was prosperous for over nineteen years, brewing beer for Weston and other nearby towns until the shots fired at Fort Sumter beginning the Civil War in 1861.

Main Street, Weston was booming in the 1840s. The street was made of tightly laid bricks. Surrounding the street were many of my small businesses, including the saloon, the hotel, a drug store and even a distillery. In the early 1840’s many people headed west to claim a land settlement of their own. Some stopped and settled in Weston while others enjoyed a stay at the International Hotel adding to my and the town’s wealth.

IN CONCLUSION

In the early 1850s Weston’s population had grown to approximately 5,000 people. The town was booming and much trading took place. Around 300 steamboats docked in Weston between the months of April and November in 1850. Once again, around the year of 1852 I felt the urge to move on, to travel westward. This time, no one, not even Cousin Bela could stop me. I told my folks, and then told Notley and shortly thereafter we decided to move to California. I’m sure it was a great shock to everyone in Weston. But, this time I knew something good would come of my leaving and my instincts came true.

My wealth mounted! I told Notley I would never forget Weston and I’m sure she never did either.

I went on to be a very successful man. I owned the building that housed the horses of the Pony Express. Later on I owned railroads, steamships and had built an empire in the business world. Before I knew it people were calling me the “Stagecoach King.”

In 1873 I lost control of my empire and became a poor man. But what kept me going those days was the thought of my early days in Weston, Missouri and my two daughters. I often shared with my girls the tales of traveling from Kentucky to a small settlement which quickly grew in to the prosperous town of Weston, Missouri. I told them how I stole Notley away while she was riding with friends. I told them how I designed the saloon and hotel and how I was the first postmaster Weston had. I never told anyone but my family how glad I was to end up in Weston, Missouri. The town that let me live.

THE END