

SECOND PLACE: OPEN DIVISION

“Steep Hills and Tall Tales”

By Frances Roach

Carved into the bluffs along the bank of the mighty muddy Missouri River, Weston Missouri was once a prosperous river commerce town. Named after the gentleman who was commissioned to design the town, it was also called “The West Town,” as it was, for a long time; the town farthest west in the Union. It wasn’t until Texas joined the Union that it lost that title. Riverboats pulled into the docks at the south end of the main street, and the passengers refreshed themselves at the various eateries and taverns. Business was brisk at the St. George Hotel, the tobacco warehouses, and the Holladay Distillery.

As time passed, lovely homes and churches were built to house and serve the people who were choosing to make the quaint town of steep hills their home. Through the years, the walls of the various buildings were filled with stories of traitors, trysts, and twists of fate. Wagon loads of travelers headed to the territories stopped to stock up and fill their water barrels before hitting the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails. The Civil War divided the town like it did the entire country, filling sections of the lovely Laurel Hill Cemetery with its casualties.

Famous people stopped in, and some even made Weston their home, at least for a while. Descendants of famous people also became prominent citizens. Immigrants, doctors, and even dogs became well known and well respected members of the town. Tall tales began to be told, some based in truth, taken from the journals of citizens and travelers who came through. Others were pure speculation into reasons for the inexplicable actions of those who had lived and died in Weston.

Hard Work and heartache were well known elements of life. Tobacco thrived on the rich soils, and many barns were built to house it while it dried, hanging from the rafter beams. Men, women, and children spent endless hours stripping the leaves and bundling it for shipment. Countless accidents occurred, including eyes being poked out with the points of the tobacco stakes. Bones were broken, children fell out of the apple trees planted in numerous orchards near town. Life was never truly dull, for there was always something happening, or at least during quiet times, there were tales to be told.

In recent years, those tales have become a yearly tradition, told during the Cemetery Stroll . . . where people dress up in period clothing and tell their “life story” while others stroll through the still red buds amid the ancient stones make the perfect setting. Other traditions have also been established. Winter brings the crowds who wish to visit the Antebellum homes, decorated for the Christmas holiday, and follow the candle lit path between them. The Apple and Irish Fests attract people by the thousands to have a taste of food, family fun, and history in the quaint little antique town of steep hills and tall tales.