

Almost a Lifetime in Devil's Elbow

Shopkeepers and Postmaster

An interview with Dorothy and Jiggs Miller



Devil's Elbow in Pulaski County has long been recognized as one of the most scenic spots in Missouri. It is a wonderful place to drive through on the original (1926) Route 66 and some 1929 pavement. There were plans in the 1930s to cover the Elbow with water from a proposed dam near Arlington. Thankfully, that plan was not carried out and the hamlet and river are still there for us to enjoy today. Wanting to know more of its history but also to get a sense of place, we talked to long time residents Jiggs and Dorothy Miller. After more than six decades of residency, they have a good sense of the place.

OSG: Mr. Miller, where and when were you born?

Jiggs: Dixon, Missouri, 1923.

OSG: What were your parents' names?

Jiggs: Enoch and Cora Miller.

OSG: And where were they born?

Jiggs: Dad was born in Franks Switch. Ever hear of it?

OSG: Frank's Switch? Yes.

Jiggs: And my mother was born in Vienna.

OSG: When did you come to Devil's Elbow?

Jiggs: 1945.

OSG: And why?

Jiggs: I got married to Dorothy and her Dad put me to work down here.

OSG: How did you two meet?

Jiggs: Dorothy's dad had a dance hall down here and that's where I met her.
Dorothy: He built a dance hall or nickelodeon. We slept upstairs over the dance hall for awhile before we built this [house.]

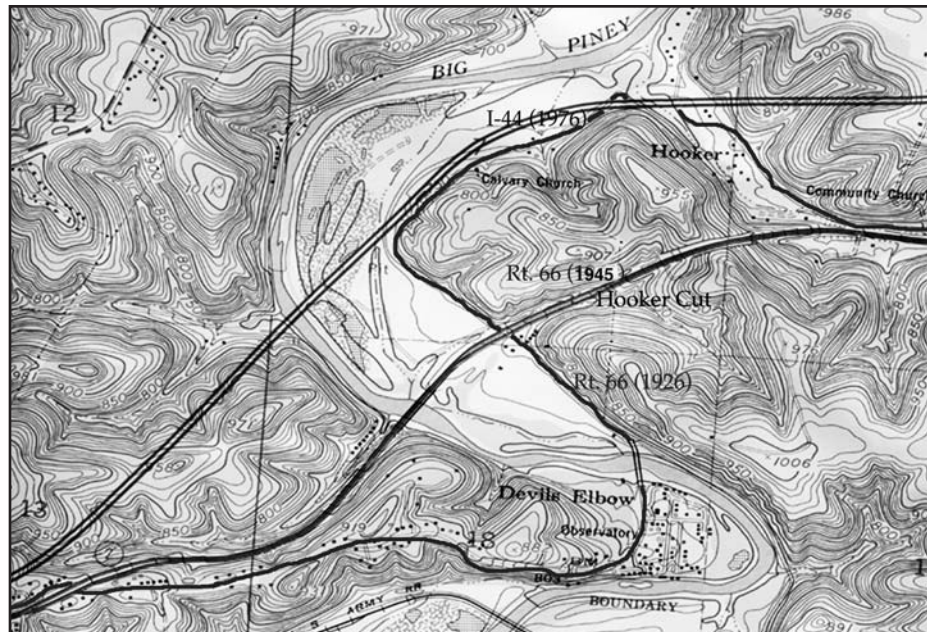
Jiggs: I always tease Dorothy that there were so many thousands of troops that came through here during World War II and she didn't get one.

OSG: She was waiting for you.

Jiggs: Yeah. Both of my sisters got guys and married them, one from California and one from Pennsylvania. And some of my girl friends got GIs and married them. I went overseas and came back and she still wasn't married.

Dorothy: My dad came down here [from Edina, Missouri.] I stayed up there for my last year in high school before I came. He had a garage, Chevrolets and John Deeres, and business wasn't good so he left because he couldn't get any more cars for the garage.

Jiggs: He came down and bought the [Devil's Elbow] cafe and, in those days, when the post office was in the building and you bought the building, it automatically came with the post office. So he bought it from Dwight



The Devil's landscape - The original Route 66 (1926) went through Hooker, around the large ridge, and through the community of Devil's Elbow. In 1945, a new four-lane road was cut through the ridge which by-passed Hooker and Devil's Elbow with its narrow bridge over the Big Piney River. Interstate 44 was completed in 1976, eliminating the Hooker Cut section, the first used and last closed four-lane section of Rt. 66 in Missouri. The map clearly shows the bend in the river that begets the name. Tie rafters negotiating the curve said, "That's a devil of an elbow."

Rench. Dwight owned the property so Dwight gave him the post office. It didn't pay nothing to anybody but if you had it in with another business, it was a help. He ran the Devil's Elbow Cafe, the post office, and had a few groceries. In those days when he had the cafe, you could sell anything. There were so many workers around here and they didn't have any place to eat. You'd sell anything you could get hold of to cook but you couldn't get hold of a lot of stuff.

Dorothy: Those workers would go to work early in the morning and they'd come down to our place and get sandwiches to take.

Jiggs: Any kind of business you were in, you could sell whatever you had, that's how crowded it was, or if you had anything you could rent to sleep in. They had trailers around here and they rented beds by the eight hour shifts.

OSG: When was the McCoy Hotel built?

Jiggs: 1942.

OSG: So the big building next door to the market now had rooms upstairs and a dance hall downstairs.

Jiggs: Yes, when it was first built but he didn't last long as a dance hall man. He [Charles McCoy, Dorothy's father] was a big man, six foot four and two-hundred and eighty-five pounds. But any time you have booze and dancing,

you have trouble. He had guys building it who were here looking for jobs at Fort Leonard Wood. While they were waiting, he would put them to work on that.

OSG: How long was it in use.

Jiggs: It's been vacant about ten years. There were several apartments upstairs and two downstairs. Dorothy's dad sold it to Childs. That's when he quit both the store and the post office. He retired. That's when I got the post office. Two guys put in for it but I got it.

OSG: And when was the store [market] built?

Jiggs: 1954.

OSG: How long did you run the market?

Jiggs: Thirty years.

OSG: What did you sell?

Jiggs: Everything.

Dorothy: Meat. We had real good meat. We even had people coming down from Waynesville to buy meat and things.

OSG: Did you rent boats?

Jiggs: Used to a long time ago, back when the fort was closed in 45-46. We rented cabins down here to people who came down from St. Louis on vacations. They stayed usually a week at a time, rent a boat, and fish. Those were wooden boats, too, and we had to have pretty good manpower to pick those boats up. Some of them were

twenty feet long.

OSG: You were the postmaster, right? How long?

Jiggs: Thirty years, until 1984. And they're going to enlarge our post office.

OSG: We are losing ours in Duke. Our postmaster is retiring and they're closing the Duke post office.

Jiggs: Maybe they're going to send your mail through Devil's Elbow (chuckle.)

OSG: That's okay with me. I wouldn't mind having a Devil's Elbow postmark.

Jiggs: You know, they quit postmarking. You know, when you mail a letter now, say to Waynesville, it goes to Springfield and comes back.

OSG: You mean it doesn't get post-marked Devil's Elbow?

Jiggs: No. Not unless you ask for it. Everyone always liked the postmark Devil's Elbow. We used to tie the mail up with a string. We had a joke at the post office. This person moved to Devil's Elbow and came to mail a letter once and they wanted to know when this letter would go out. I said "as soon as I get a bag full." [Laughter] That was a girl from Chicago. She said. "Well, I don't know how you guys do things."

OSG: You had to do it all?

Jiggs: Yeah, we sorted it and fixed it all up for the route.

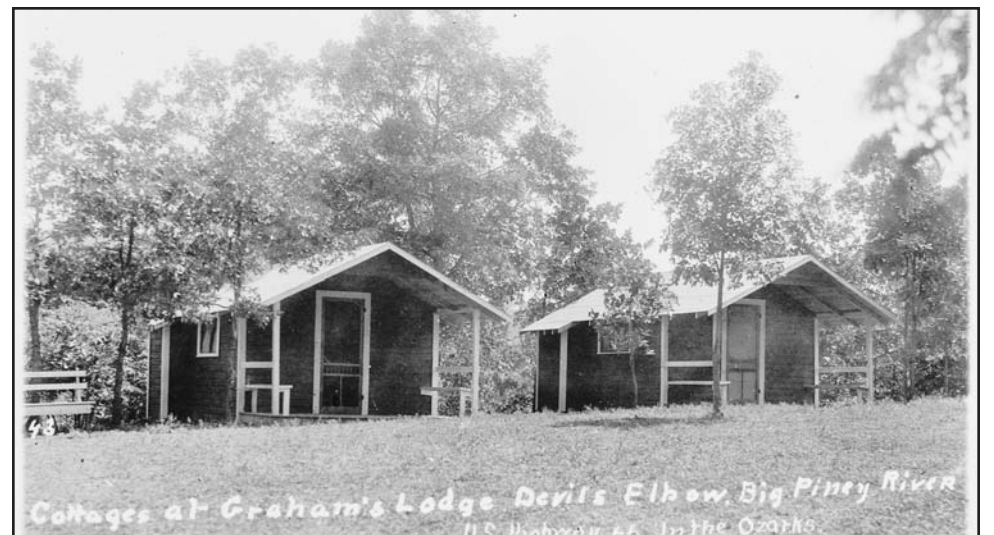
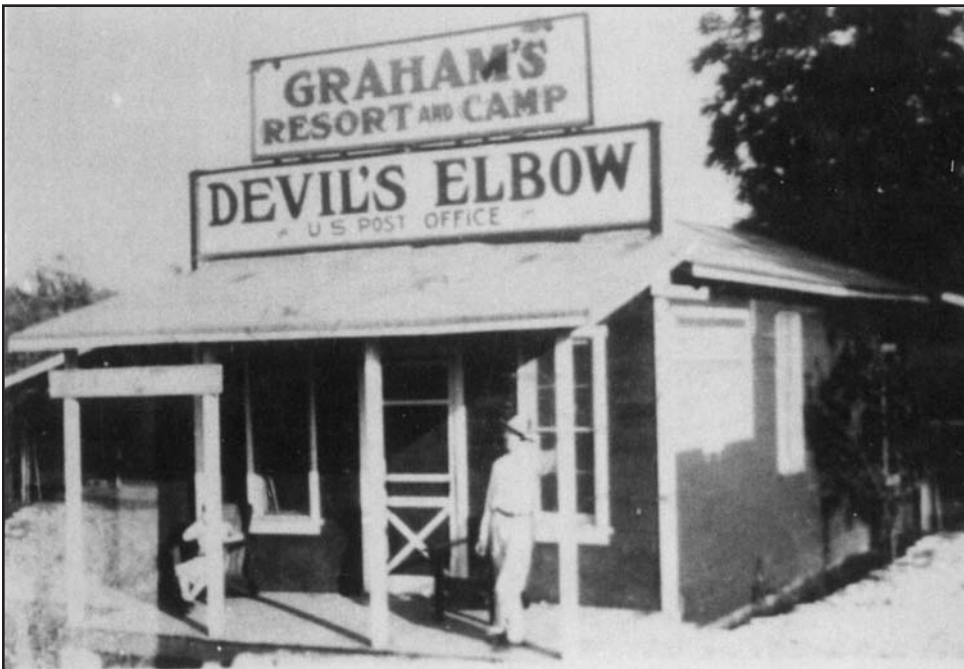
[Interview continued on Page 59.]



The Charles McCoy family in 1941. Pictured are C. O., wife Maggie, Dorothy, Paul, and youngest daughter Norma. The McCoy's moved to Devil's Elbow from Edina, MO to find more business opportunities on Route 66 and near Fort Leonard Wood, which was under construction. Courtesy of Dorothy and Jiggs Miller.

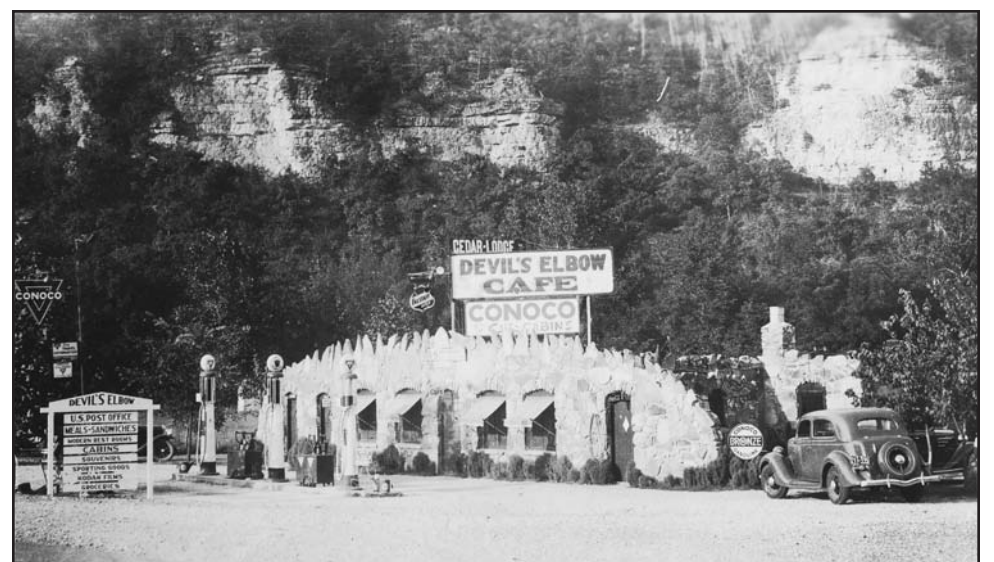


A seldom seen photograph of Devil's Elbow in the bustling days of 1941. The large building under construction, center right, is McCoy's Store and Post Office (the third post office), which contained a short-lived dance hall on the first floor. To the left of McCoy's is Hiawatha Lodge, still standing but now a fine home. To the left of Hiawatha Lodge is the Devil's Elbow Cafe, the second post office in the community. At far left in the background is Cedar Lodge. Notice the trailers and cabins that housed workers at Fort Leonard Wood. Photograph courtesy of State Historic Preservation Office.



Pictured immediately above and to the right are the first two post offices in Devil's Elbow. The cabins were two of several at the resort. Walter E. Graham was the first postmaster, 1927-1933. Dwight Rench, who built the infernal Devil's Elbow Cafe, served from 1933-1935. Harold McKibben was postmaster from 1935-1937, then Rench resumed duties until 1941 when Charles McCoy bought the cafe and became postmaster.

The community is not mentioned in Goodspeed's 1889 history of Pulaski County. The bend in the river is labeled "Devil's Elbow" on the 1906 Lumpkin and Matthews map, with but one dwelling shown, labeled "B. C. Robert." Apparently, enough growth occurred in the next two decades to warrant a post office. The growth, no doubt, was aided by the automobile traffic on State Highway 14, which became Route 66 in 1926. Photographs courtesy of John Bradbury.





Left: Teenager Dorothy McCoy poses to promote her family's business.

Right: Winter, 1944, and a view of the cabins kept rented by the soldiers at nearby Fort Leonard Wood.

Below left: Postcard of McCoy's in 1942, the full service stop for residents and travelers on Route 66.

Below right: The hill and S-curve coming out of the Devil's Elbow valley, going west. This was original Route 66. The early post-and-cable guard rail was replaced by the WPA stone wall in the thirties.



Photos courtesy of Dorothy and Jiggs Miller.



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OSG: And some people would come and pick up their mail.

Jiggs: Yes, and they have more post office boxes now.

OSG: What about some of the resorts that people came to on Route 66? What about Graham's Resort?

Jiggs: That was Walter Graham's but Till Andres built it. That was Walter Graham's brother-in-law from Jerome. Till Andres built it and Walter Graham ran it and had the first post office right there in front of it in the late twenties. Walter ran it for him (Till Andres) until he sold the property. It has changed hands several times and my son owns it now.

[Walter E. Graham was the first postmaster of Devil's Elbow and served from 1927 until 1933. Graham's brother-in-law, Till Andres, was the brother of Perry Andres. The Andres brothers were very successful outfitters catering to the sporting elite in St. Louis. Graham's Camp later became Big Piney Lodge.]

OSG: What was it like during the heyday of Route 66, during the tourist seasons down here? Was it really busy?

Jiggs: No, I didn't notice it being so busy. Of course, they changed the route in 1945-46. They built the four-lane during World War II and it was the first four-lane highway they had through here, from J highway to up here [Grandview]. I was in the Army when they made Hooker Cut. That was the first big cut they made. I was reading about it this morning when looking for some post office papers. Found some postage from that time. A

stamp was three cents. I ran the post office for two years with three cents [stamps.] I retired as the postmaster in 1984. When I started at the post office, I got \$2200 a year, that's what it paid. But it was in with the store see so, all the time I was there, I got sixteen dollars a month rent.

OSG: [Looking at postal document.] Charles McCoy is listed as the outgoing postmaster. Pronounce your first name for me.

Jiggs: Oth-ole. A-t-h-o-l-l.

OSG: How did you get your nickname Jiggs.

Jiggs: Well, my dad had a barber shop in Dixon and he used to send me to the post office to get the mail which was up the street two doors. The boys in the post office started to call me Jiggs for some reason, probably because the way my hair was laying. And with the name Atholl, everybody was ready to say Jiggs.

OSG: What was it like raising a family in Devil's Elbow?

Jiggs: Oh, it was nice, you know. You didn't have to worry about them. Everybody knew everybody and if a kid was wrong, it would probably get back to his folks. Couldn't get by with too much.

OSG: Did a lot of people come in the summer and stay in the cabins?

Jiggs: Yeah, we had that when the fort was closed. Otherwise, the cabins were all rented to GIs when the fort was open. We had about 40 cabins down there in Devil's Elbow within walking distance of the store.

OSG: So [Devil's Elbow] wasn't seasonal?

Jiggs: No, just during those short years was it seasonal. Mr. Ichord had his place [the old McCoy Hotel], Dwight Rensch had his place [Hiawatha Lodge and cabins], Big Piney River Lodge had about 14 cabins, I think. This close to post, you could rent them real quick.

OSG: What impact did the by-pass have?

Jiggs: That didn't have much that I knew of, although I wasn't here when it went in. Wasn't too much 'cause it's just a short hop from the road. But old 66 was so crooked through here. Did you ever read about the trucks going up the hills so slow that people would jump up on the trucks and steal stuff off of them. Hills were so steep a truck driver wouldn't dare stop 'cause he wouldn't get started again. See, all the places of business on old 66 closed up, most of them. This place here was a cafe [pointing to where the Devil's Elbow Cafe was], Gibson's had a garage up here, McClary had a souvenir stand up here. They all moved out to Buckhorn or some place like that to stay on the highway.

OSG: You've seen a lot of changes.

Jiggs: Not too many people have seen the changes we have seen.

OSG: What are the biggest changes you have seen?

Jiggs: Oh, highways, I think. I believe that's the biggest change and airplanes. They've got planes flying and you don't know what keeps them in the sky.

OSG: What are your fondest memories

of living here in Devil's Elbow?

Jiggs: I have a lot of fine memories. I just enjoyed working here and running the store. One thing I had was a good bunch of people to trade with you. They were good steady customers, you know.

OSG: In the thirties, the State Planning Commission named Devil's Elbow as one of the eight most scenic places in Missouri.

Jiggs: Yeah, but we didn't know that. We just took it for granted.

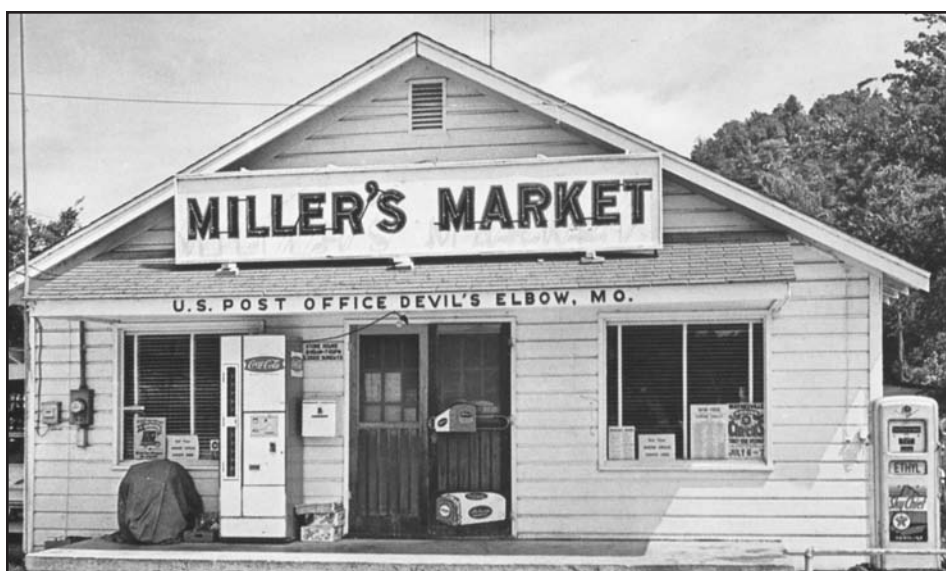
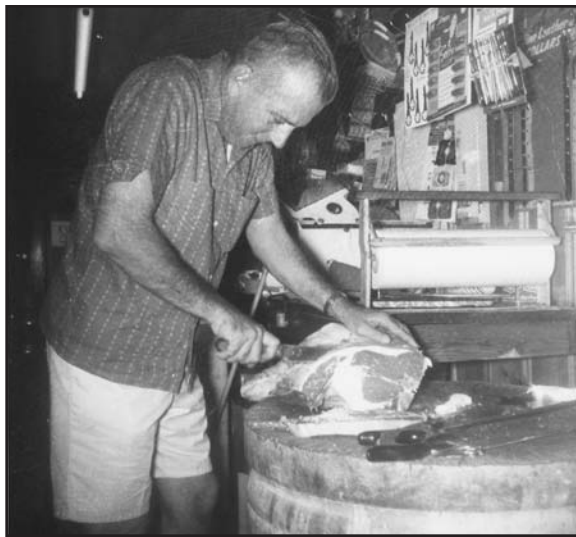
OSG: What changes have you seen in Devil's Elbow over the years?

Jiggs: Not a whole lot. It's growing a little bit, a few people moving in but not a whole lot of changes. And that's good.

Dorothy: There's not anything for anybody to come here for anymore.

Jiggs: Well, there's probably as much as there ever was. It's quiet and you just don't have much traffic, although we are getting a little more traffic with people moving in. We've had some good neighbors but we've seen a lot of them go. You know, when you get into the eighties, there are not too many left.

[The interview ended with Jiggs making a brief reference to his service in World War II. He trained in artillery at Ft. Sill, went to England, and then participated in the invasion of France and saw "quite a bit of combat." After the Battle of the Bulge and Belgium, he marched on into Germany and collected five battle stars. Jiggs and Dorothy are still living in Devil's Elbow, across from the store.]



Top left: In the days before shrink wrapped meat, steaks and chops were cut to order in the thickness you wanted, as Jiggs is doing here.

Bottom left: Miller's Market in 1962. The market, built in 1954 when it became the fourth post office, still serves the Devil's Elbow community as store and post office, although now as Shelden's Market.

Top right: Aerial photo of downtown Devil's Elbow in the seventies. The long structure at center left is the McCoy market, which became an apartment building and is now vacant. Below McCoy's is Miller's Market. Across the street is the Dorothy and Jiggs Miller home. Hiawatha Lodge, now a home, is at bottom center. This view of Devil's Elbow is pretty much the same today. Photos courtesy of Dorothy and Jiggs Miller.