

the early days of

# Big Piney

by Terry Primas

The village of Big Piney is the southernmost town in Pulaski County. It escaped being appropriated by Fort Leonard Wood, but barely (see map on page 32). In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the residents had a feeling of growth, characterized by the descriptive phrase of "on the boom."

Big Piney began, as villages often did, as a post office. Silas Page established a post office in 1880 in his large log

house. Page's house was near the head of McCourtney Hollow on the Three Notch Road, about a mile and a half north of the present location of Big Piney.

The main north/south road in those early days was the Houston Road, which started in Waynesville and ended in Houston, the county seat of Texas County. The Three Notch Road was a spur of the Houston Road, running in a southeasterly direction. The road was nothing more than wagon ruts through the timber, sometimes hard to follow. Every so often there would be a tree with three ax notches in it to mark the route.

Around 1890, William Scales from Maries County appeared and rented or leased a piece of ground near Silas Page's Big Piney post office. Scales built a board-and-batten general merchandise store and an adjacent two room house. With the post office and store established, Bob Peterson built a blacksmith shop and house. That constituted the original town of Big Piney, a mile and a half northwest of its present location.

In December of 1895, Silas Page deeded the SW 1/4 of the NW 1/4 (40 acres) of a 160 acre quarter section that he acquired in November of 1895 through homesteading, to William E. Lawson of Pulaski County and C. W. Crismon of Maries County. In January of 1896, Lawson and Crismon platted the town of Big Piney at its present location.

This new town consisted of four blocks of eight lots each. The lots were 60 feet wide and 140 feet long. The blocks were separated by streets of 60 foot width, running at right angles to each other. Each block was divided by an alley 20 feet wide running east and west.

There was an exception in the 40 acres of the new town. Two acres were deeded to James H. Ross, C. W. Dye, and B. F. Page who were the trustees for the Hopewell Baptist Church. The church was organized at the Hopewell log school house in 1869 by John Springer and Reverend Hibbs. The old church was located on the east side of the Big Piney River, on a ridge above the farm of W. W. McDonald. After Hibbs, successive pastors were Alexander Hendrix, Tommy Zumwalt, and J. J. Watts, among others.

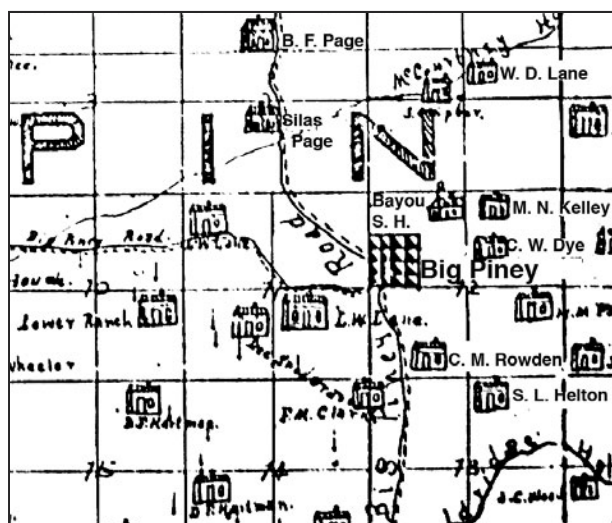
The church was relocated in 1896 to the new town of Big Piney. A frame one

room building was constructed. According to Emma Page Hicks, the church was "just east of the cemetery gate and just south of Silas and Charlotte Page's big square gray granite tombstone." That places the original church inside the rock wall that fronts the cemetery today. (The first graveyard fence was wire, installed in 1904.) The first church did not survive the 1926 tornado (see Page 50).

W. W. McDonald was the first burial in the newly consecrated church graveyard adjacent to the church. James H. Ross, church trustee, was McDonald's son-in-law. Before settling on his farm on the Big Piney River in the 1870s, McDonald built a stagecoach stop and tavern on the square in Waynesville in the 1850s. That building today is the Old Stagecoach Stop House Museum.

It didn't take long for W. J. "Bill" Scales to see that the future was not at the "old town" of Big Piney, next to Silas Page and McCourtney Hollow but at the "new town" platted in January, 1896. In May, Lawson and Crismon sold lots 7 and 8 in Block 2 (see plat map on next page) to Bill Scales for \$80.00. Citizens referred to the first location as Old Town and to the second location as New Town. A few locals still refer to Big Piney as New Town.

It seems Lawson and Crismon retired



Environs of Big Piney in Piney Township, Pulaski County. Detail of 1906 Lumpkin and Matthews map.

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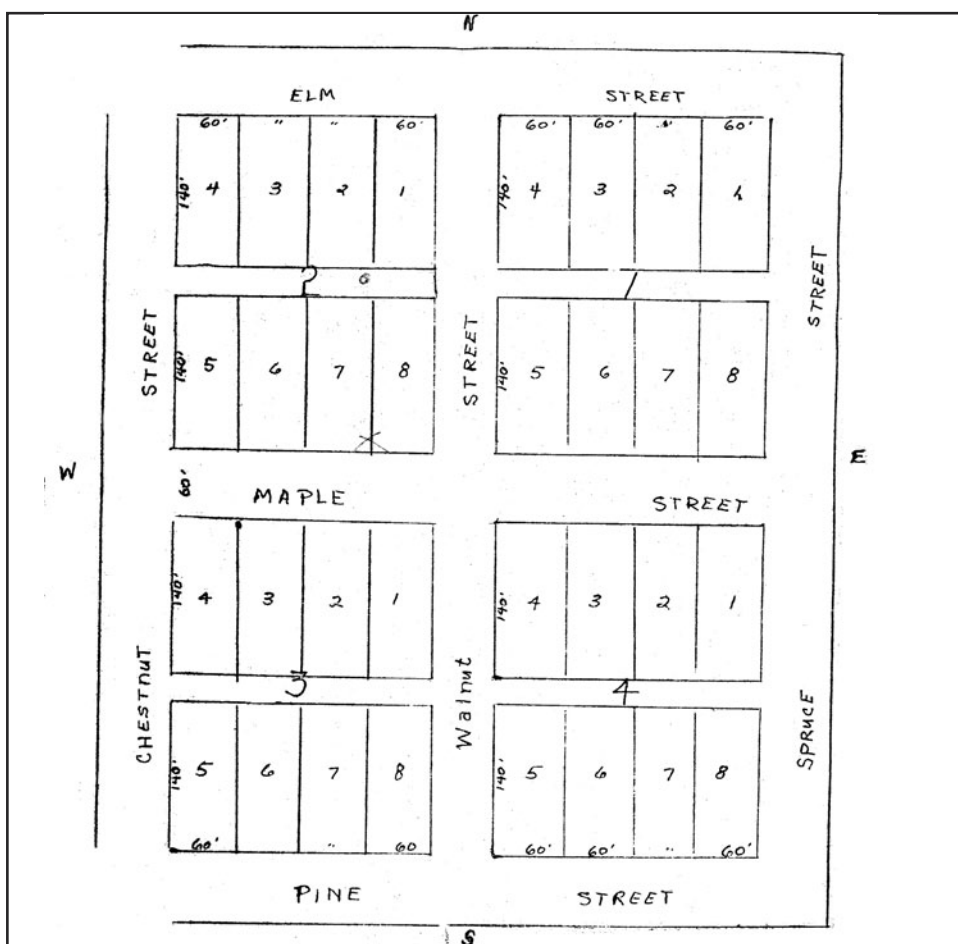
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The original 1896 plat of the Town of Big Piney shows plans for six streets, eight blocks, and a total of 32 large lots. Today, State Highway TT from the west terminates at the corner of Maple and Walnut and becomes a county gravel road (Western). Walnut Street from Maple going north is now Wildwood Lane. It is now closed at the Fort Leonard Wood boundary, no longer providing direct access to Fort Wood and towns north. Since Big Piney is in an unincorporated part of the county, the tree street names have been replaced by computer generated ones, bearing no relation to the history of the county—always a sore spot. Surrounding counties have not obliterated historic names for a 911 simplicity.

from the town building business in favor of W. J. Scales and his wife, Sarah E., who began acquiring a sizable chunk of Big Piney real estate. Holdings included 49 acres on both sides of Maple Street, west of Walnut. This includes Scales' original purchase of Lots 7 and 8 in Block 2, the future site of their hotel.

William J. Scales and his wife, Sarah, brought a lot of energy and vision to the embryonic village. William was born in Indiana in 1850. At age 46, he was beginning his personal empire building. Sarah, a Missourian, was 27 years old. They had a daughter, Dora, aged 13 from Bill's previous marriage, living at home.

Scales repeatedly used his property, particularly Lots 5 and 8 in Block 2, to secure notes between 1897 and 1902 worth a total of at least \$2,930. The notes, ranging in size from \$250 to \$1200 at 8% interest were always paid when due or before. The lenders were local men with an interest in seeing the new community succeed. Among them were Benjamin F. Page, W. D. Ichord, Robert Warren, Albert S. Long, Lonnie Lane, S. L. Helton, J. M. Elkins, and Alexander Hendrix.

Scales constructed a large store on Lot 1, Block 3 and a three room house next to it. A doctor, William Derry, was

attracted to the area and he occupied Scales' old house near McCourtney Hollow.

The Big Piney post office, Silas Page's concession at Old Town since 1880, was moved to New Town in 1897 with Alexander Hendrix as postmaster. The postmastership was passed around in the early years. There were four more postmasters after Hendrix between 1897 and 1900 when Hendrix took the post again and kept it until 1909. In a small village, the postmaster is usually the proprietor of the general merchandise store. Succeeding postmasters were also Big Piney retailers, including Homer Burns (1909), Francis M. Clark (1910), William O. Ichord (1913), Ben Noakes (1915), Burley A. Dye (1916), Ernest C. Hix (1917), Silas B. Sneed (1919), William Page (1934), George B. Dye (1935), Gladys M. Dye (1945), Vernon R. Page (1946), Marjorie Page (1952), and Lillian Welch (1954).

Bill Scales was neither short on vision nor risk taking. Besides supplies, two things brought rural folk to town: the post office and a mill. In 1902, Big Piney had a post office. There was a mill on the Roubidoux at Cookville to the west. Waynesville did not have a mill yet. In Bloodland, the Jaspar Brothers, in partnership with William Cunningham, entered the milling busi-

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ness sometime during the decade, but exactly when their roller mill became operational is unknown. It seems the corn cracker at Miller Spring was a thing of the past. A roller mill was running at Beulah in Phelps County, a dozen rugged miles east. The water powered grist mill on the Big Piney at Hazleton was more than twenty miles to the south. Big Piney was upland with no running stream for water power. A roller mill powered by an engine looked like a good business venture and a great convenience for the people.

In March of 1902, W. J. and Sarah E. Scales secured a note of \$1200 from A. Hendrix and others. It appears Scales built a mill building. In August of 1902, W. J. and Sarah E. Scales conveyed Lots 7 and 8 to Barnard and Lease Manufacturing Company to secure four notes, each for the sum of \$555.50, for a total of \$2222.00. Barnard and Lease was a company in Moline, Illinois that supplied farm and milling equipment. The due dates for the notes were staggered, due in 6, 12, 18, and 24 months.

This was quite a capital investment on the part of Bill Scales and showed his faith in New Town and its location. According to Emma Page Hicks, Bill Ed and Mary Lawson were running the mill. Scales, most likely, was running the store. Apparently, the merchandise and milling business was good. The notes were repaid by July of 1904.

The town was indeed growing. In 1904 the correspondent to the *Pulaski County Democrat* reported, "There are now three large dry good stores in Big Piney and all have a good trade." Thomas and Page kept the hearth hot at the blacksmith shop. There was no mention of the milling business but the tie business was booming. "Several thousand ties were rafted down the Nile (Big Piney River) last week." The timber business was a big part of the

economy. Lane and Company had their portable sawmill in operation at Ross Ford, where the new concrete bridge is today. A feeling of community pride and service must have prevailed, too. Big Piney had an Odd Fellows lodge, and a Modern Woodmen of America lodge was established by 1906.

It was in 1905 that Bill Scales made his greatest leap of faith regarding the future of New Town. He and Sarah on occasion kept traveling men overnight in their three-room house. With the town growing, visits by drummers and peddlers increased. Bloodland, a few miles northwest, although a growing rural mercantile center, had no commercial overnight accommodations. There were no hotels in southern Pulaski County.

With several pieces of property as security, Scales borrowed \$1100.00 from J. M. Elkins in January of 1905. Although this loan might have been for other operations, it seems more likely that large sum was for the construction of the three story hotel. Such a large structure required months to build. News of the venture appeared in the *Democrat* in February of 1906. The brief item said, "W. J. Scales is building a good hotel and a substantial barn, which adds to the town's beauty."

By summer, the sixteen room hotel was ready for the finish work. In May the paper reported, "Ed Burchard is at Big Piney this week, painting W. J. Scales' new hotel building. It is said Mr. Scales has one of the best hotel buildings in the country, and Ed is sure to do a good job painting it for he understands his business."

Another infusion of cash was needed in June. This time, instead of borrowing from one of the area men, Scales went to the Bank of Waynesville. They required substantially more collateral for the relatively small loan. He again put up Lots 7 and 8, upon which the hotel

was being built, along with 28.77 acres for a loan of \$300. This money might have been for hotel startup costs (bedding, dishes, etc.) or for the final touches. The *Democrat* noted at the end of August, "J. Gove, Crocker's popular plasterer, passed through town Monday enroute to Big Piney to plaster the big hotel building for W. J. Scales."

Another construction project started in Big Piney as the hotel was nearing completion. At the end of June, the directors of School District 3 called for bids to erect a new school house to replace the one room Bayou School. The specifications called for "Said house to be a frame weather-boarded and sealed, put on a stone foundation 12 inches in the ground and 12 inches above. Covered with galvanized Corrugated roofing, 28 by 40, 20 feet high, 2 rooms, two flights of stairs, 6 foot porch on one end, 4 doors, twenty windows, iron flues, painted three coats of paint of the best lead and oil inside and out. Contractor to furnish all material and to have said house completed by the 1st of September 1906." George Lane, Sr. taught the last term of school to be held at the old Bayou School. He resigned as teacher in favor of his new job as tax collector.

Evidently, the contractor didn't meet the September 1st deadline as the school didn't start until October. Emma Page Hicks taught at the new Big Piney School in 1906. It was the first time the school had two teachers. Emma taught fourth grade and down on the lower floor. She had 50 students, including some five year olds. Alex Hickey had the upper grades on the upper floor. Emma got \$25.00 a month. As was the custom, Mr. Hickey got more, probably \$35.00.

In 1907, the mill was operated by W. F. Marlow. He built a "neat cottage" near the mill. It is not known if he owned the mill but it seems likely.

There were two dry goods stores, a grocery store, Peterson's blacksmith shop, and the Odd Fellows and Woodmen lodges were going strong. (The Oddfellows were addressed in their hall above Burns' store by the Honorable T. L. Rubey, former Missouri Lieutenant Governor.)

The Big Piney correspondent reported that "W. F. Marlow is having his dwelling painted and otherwise beautified and his roller mill is running at full capacity and our merchants are kept busy supplying goods to the farmers." Of course, the local newspaper correspondents were boosters of their communities but it was a time of general prosperity in the county. A year later, in 1909, Marlow was on record as producing meal, flour, and with the installation of a new 55 inch saw, also lumber. By August of 1910, Mr. Roechiese was in charge of the Big Piney mill due to the death of Mr. Marlow. Incidentally, Mrs. Marlow was the telephone operator.

It was also in 1909 that W. J. Scales first talked of leaving the village he helped grow and prosper. Reportedly, he was talking of trading his Big Piney property for a farm near Nebo in Wright County. It was not idle talk. The *Pulaski County Democrat* noted in April that "W. J. Scales, proprietor of the Big Piney hotel, was in town briefly Wednesday enroute to Crocker. Mr. Scales has purchased property in Crocker and will move there sometime this fall." It followed with an item in December that stated, "W. J. Scales and lady, for many years proprietor of the hotel in Big Piney but now of Crocker, were here on business Monday."

Scales and lady had indeed left Big Piney. Why he abruptly left the community of which he was an integral part is a puzzle. Bill Scales was 60 years old and certainly led an active life. He simply may have been tired and



Organized in 1869 on the east side of the Big Piney River, the Hopewell Church congregation built a new church in Big Piney in 1896. The frame building was hit on Thanksgiving Day in 1926 by a tornado (see panorama of the town destruction on page 52). Courtesy of John Bradbury.



The church was rebuilt by the members. Instead of next to the cemetery, it was relocated across the road. The *Richland Mirror* in 1928 that another tornado "lifted the church off its foundation" but did not report how severe the damage was. The second tornado was not mentioned elsewhere. Photo by Terry Primas.

wished to slow down or there might have been a business opportunity in the railroad town of Crocker that interested him. It seems he didn't stay in Crocker long, though. He and his wife do not appear in the 1910 census and there is no record of their death in the county. He left as suddenly as he appeared twenty years ago.

Scales sold his New Town property of 28.77 acres plus Lots 7 and 8 in Block 2, which included the hotel property, to Homer Burns, who was running Scales old store. The selling price of the hotel property was \$4,000.00. Burns sold the acreage and hotel three months later to C. M. Rowden for the same amount.

Emma Page Hicks (more correctly Emma Page Ichord Setser Hicks) grew up in Big Piney. She taught school at Hopewell, Big Piney, and Crocker and lived in several places around the county. She wrote a series of more than 300 articles titled "Early History of Pioneer Pulaski County Families" for the *Pulaski County Democrat* between 1977 and 1983. She often wrote of Big Piney and left us some valuable information about the community's early days.

Emma and her first husband, Bill Ichord, owned a store in Big Piney from 1911 until 1915. Emma's description of that experience evokes the general store common a century ago. She wrote in July of 1978:

"Stores weren't like they are now. There were shelves all around the walls as high or higher than you could reach. Then counters all in front of the shelves. No one was supposed to go behind the counters but the clerks. On these counters were big glass show cases to display things in and they opened from behind the counter. On the grocery side there were scales to weigh groceries. Such as coffee, sugar, rice, beans, meat, crackers, candies, most everything came in bulk.

Crackers were bought in large tin cans, and weighed on scales. Lard was bought in five gallon cans and weighed. Or maybe some big families would buy a five gallon can. Sometimes we sold gallon buckets of lard.

One side of the store was dry goods in big bolts and we had to measure this by the yard. Also laces and ribbons. We had one section for all kinds of shoes. We even had the post office and Bill was Post Master. Around the store outside there were hitch racks and place to tie the horse outside, while the people were in the store.

The men usually had a place or two to pitch horseshoes in town and as we called them, "The Loafers" would have a good time. And sometimes on cold days they would play checkers game inside. The stores had a space in the

center and plenty of room. Most of these older men chewed tobacco and some of them didn't care where they spit. We kept a pan or a box with ashes in for them to spit in. Sometimes they would miss the box and spit on the stove pad. This is what disgusted me. Bill never used tobacco in any form. We sold a lot of tobacco in twists and some called flat tobacco that was pressed and in long shaped cakes and marked where to cut and we had a tobacco cutter that set on the counter. Then we sold smoking tobacco. It was put up in sacks and sometimes came in cans."

The store Emma owned (Bill died in 1917 from tuberculosis) was destroyed in the 1926 tornado. Emma, who was born in 1886, died in Waynesville in 1988.

The hub of the village, the hotel, changed hands in 1916. Charles and Maggie Rowden sold the building to L. W. and Lucy Fisher. The Fishers kept the hotel a short time and sold it to S. B. "Ben" and Dora Sneed in 1918 for \$2500. It was a homecoming of sorts for Ben's wife. She was Dora Scales, daughter of Bill Scales who opened the hotel in 1906. The Sneeds also had a store in Big Piney.

Ben and Dora Sneed operated the Big Piney Hotel for 26 years. It does not seem likely that the occupancy rate of the sixteen room hotel was high, particularly during the depression years of the 1930s. It is likely that the Sneeds experienced the halcyon years of the business, too. We have no record or account but the hotel must have been crammed with guests during the building phase of Fort Leonard Wood. The rooms were probably rented out twice

a day as at the Tourist Hotel (aka Old Stagecoach Stop) in Waynesville.

The Sneeds sold the Big Piney Hotel in 1944 to Phoebe J. Mattison, "a single woman," and, as Ben's health was poor, moved to a farm near Lebanon. Phoebe married Durard Cassidy and they sold the hotel to Brian and Gladys Dye after two years of ownership. The Dyes ran the hotel for eleven years before selling the property to D. H. and Thelma Chalfant in 1957. During their tenure, State Highway TT was widened and the right-of-way took part of the fronts of Lots 7 and 8. Thelma's husband died in 1959. Thelma kept the hotel another 20 years and then sold it to Elsie Collins, another "single person", in 1979. Thelma died that same year. After three years of ownership, Elsie found buyers in Arturo and Anna Sanchez. The current proprietors, James and Karen Pearce, bought the hotel property in 1991. They are currently rehabilitating Bill Scales imposing structure.

Big Piney's history is one of entrepreneurs and hustling businessmen. The Page family, Bill Scales, and others created a robust inland and upland community in isolated southern Pulaski County. Scales' early domination of business in the village was followed in the 1930s by another energetic busi-

nessman, Zina Sneed, who ran a store, garage, and the feed mill (see next page).

It is also a comeback story. The town was nearly leveled by a tornado on Thanksgiving Day in 1926 and rebuilt. It is a testament to the construction skills of Bill Scales and whomever helped that the tallest building in town withstood the whirlwind with little damage (see panorama on Page 53).

However, the vigor from the rebuilding lasted barely two decades. Big Piney real estate was not gobbled up by Fort Leonard Wood as was Bloodland, Cookville, and Tribune but the town withered nonetheless. With the populace to the north and east gone, the school enrollment declined. The school hung on until 1977 and closed.

The stranglehold was further tightened after September 11, 2001. The road north from the center of town to Fort Leonard Wood, the old Big Piney Road, was closed. Access from the north is now from the South Gate's Highway AW to State Highway TT, a distance of about four miles. The village has not been a recipient of the moderate growth around the South Gate of Fort Leonard Wood and southward along State Highway AW. But the Big Piney Hotel is being revitalized and may one day soon shelter lodgers.

#### Sources

*Early History of Pioneer Pulaski County, Missouri, Families*, collection of articles written by Emma Page Hicks, published in the *Pulaski County Democrat* 1977-1983, compiled by Donald W. Page.

*Pulaski County Democrat*, news from Big Piney correspondents, 1904-1910.

Thanks to James and Karen Pearce for access to the Abstract of Title for the Big Piney Hotel. Without it, this story of the early days of Big Piney and Bill Scales' activities could not have been told.



Many of these 1903 Bayou School students made the transition to the new Big Piney school which replaced Bayou in 1906. The family names are familiar as settlers of the area. First Row, l-r: unknown, Ches Helton, Boss Page, Linsey Clark, Charley Lawson, Homer Page, John Helton, Pansy Carroll, Maggie Lane, Anna Lane, next four unknown. Second Row: unk., unk., Burley Dye, Charley Lawson, Ora Hendrix, Bert Clark, unk., Anna Woods, Retta Helton, Celesta Ross, next two Bray girls, Pansy Lane. Third row: Woods boy, Silas Kelley, Peck Woods, Eddie Vaughn, Bill Page, Frank Ichord, Clarence Kelley, George Carroll, Nute Woods, Teacher George Phillips, Stacy Lane, Icy Rowden, Nannie Vaughn, Ethel Dye, Laura Page, Pansy Ross, Ellen Bray, Gusta Lawson, May Carroll. Fourth Row: unk., Dick Ichord, Lula Clark, Stella Helton, Vina Vaughn, Ada Page, Emma Page, Retta Page, Mollie Page, Dora Page, Clara Ichord, Lizzie Page, Anna Page, unk., Mattie Sneed, Ada Page, Carrie Rowden. Fifth Row: Pete Dye, Dick McDonald, Ollie Sneed, Ora Hendrix, Ed Woods, Wayne Clark, Bill McDonald, Whis Dye, John Ichord, Jimmy Lane, Bill Ichord, Harley Dye, Charley Page, Bob Page, Zina Sneed, Jake Lane, Ed Clark, Sherman Page, Joe Miller or Woods. Picture taken by Ben F. Page. Students identified by Emma Page Hicks.

# Growing Up in Big Piney

## an interview with Chester Sneed

I was born in 1919 in Big Piney. My father's name was Zina [pronounced Zinay] Emory Sneed. My mother's name was Viola. Her maiden name was Firestine. I have three brothers and five sisters. One sister lives in Richland and one in California. That's all that is left. I went to school in Big Piney in a one-room school, a big room, and the grades were first grade to eighth grade. My teachers were Gladys Dye and Mrs. Rowden. There were about thirty or thirty-five in the school. We lived just a little way from school and we went home for lunch. When I got out of school, I used to haul stave bolts with my dad's truck to Lebanon and I'd bring back a load of slabs for wood. I spent a lot of time cutting wood, getting it in for winter, stack it up on the porch, and stuff like that. Dad had a grocery store, and a feed mill, and garage. I hauled feed, too, from Rich-

land. We picked up baled hay in Richland at Bohannon's. We got feed from Bohannon's and MFA. It was right across the street from Bohannon's then.

We ground corn for meal and for chops, for cattle to eat. We made corn meal out of white corn. We made meal out of yellow corn, too. People would come in with a wagon load of corn, shucks and all, and we ground it up and made feed for the farmers. My dad sold it all because he couldn't take care of it. It was the Big Piney Feed Mill. Both mother and father are buried in the Big Piney Cemetery, not far from the front gate.

**OSG:** Do you remember the old hotel in Big Piney? Do you remember who owned it at the time?

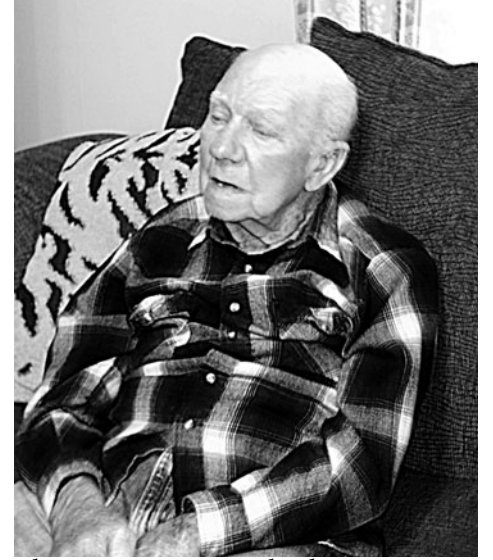
**Chester:** Oh, yeah. Ben Sneed. I forget his wife's name [Dora].

**OSG:** Was it a busy place?

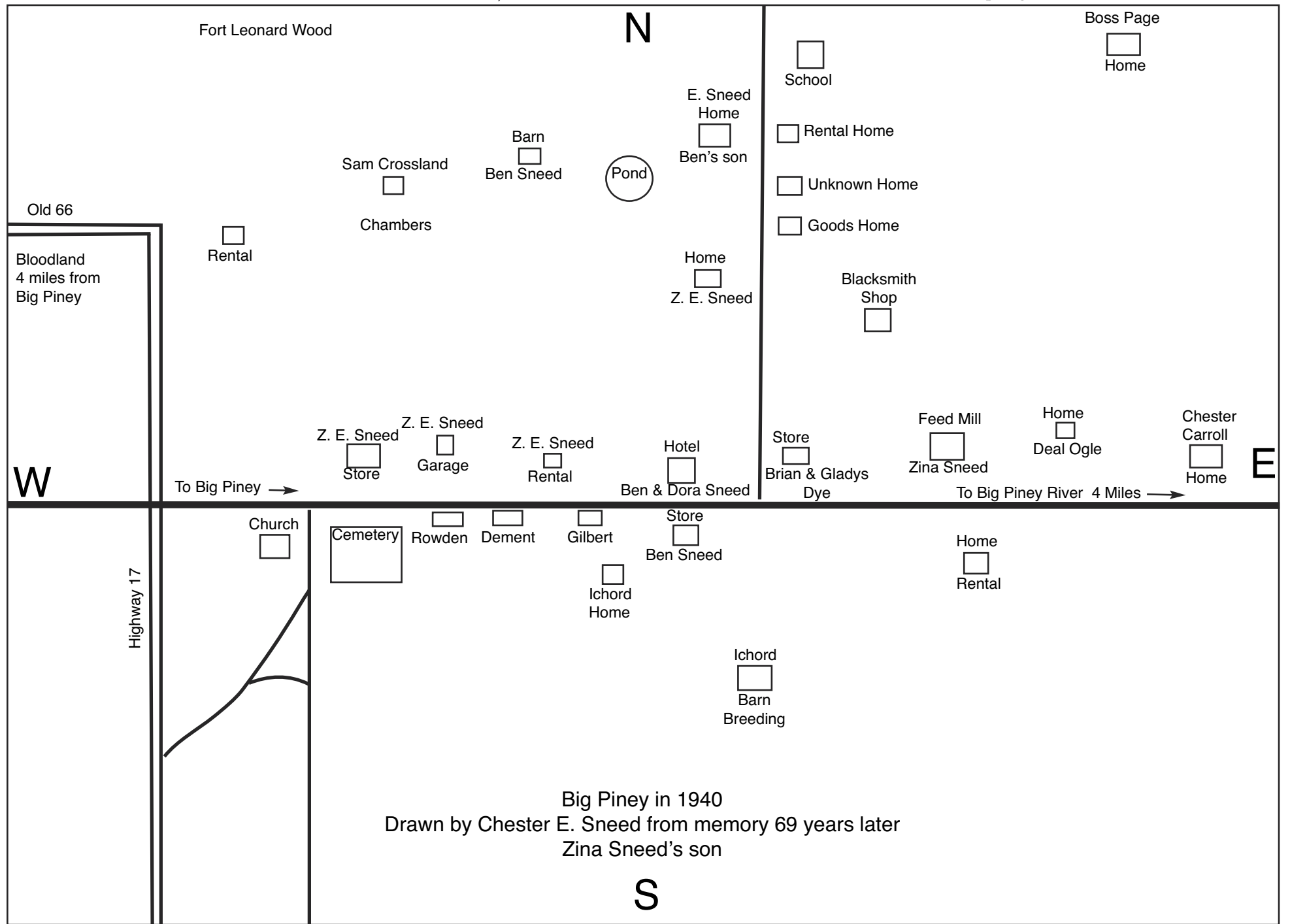
**Chester:** Everybody in the country came in there. You see, it was farm

country and they'd buy groceries and they'd buy feed. Back during the time of WPA, there was a CCC camp east of Big Piney River [Blooming Rose - see *Old Settlers Gazette* 2005, pages 36-44, for a history of the camp]. The CCC boys used to come in there in trucks and they'd all jump out. My dad sold sandwiches and they all had to have a cheese sandwich or boloney sandwich but half of them had no money [but] dad would give them a sandwich. One of my older sisters met a CCC boy and they finally got married and moved to Illinois. I took kids in town that wanted to go swimming to the river. My dad had a truck, the one we hauled feed in from Richland, but there wasn't nothing else to do on Sundays so on Sunday evening I would tell them to get in the truck and I'd take them to the river. So we'd all go down there and stay two or three hours, at Ross Bridge (on the Big Piney) and some of them just messed around. And then there was Miller Cave. I'd take them to Miller Cave and we'd go in there some Sundays. There was some fishermen who used to come to Big Piney in the summertime from

St. Louis. They wanted somebody to take them way up the river and then they'd float down and then that evening go get them either by the Big Piney bridge or down by Miller where the spring was. They used to come up there once a year and I'd take them way up the river in the truck with the boat on the truck and they'd float eight or ten miles. I think they stayed at the hotel. Our home was right down be-



Chester Sneed, 90, at his home in Springfield, Missouri.



hind the hotel. Ben Sneed had a big farm down on the Piney and their boy, Elmer, took care of it while Ben and his wife ran the hotel and store [in Big Piney]. Brian and Gladys Dye had a store there, too. There were three stores there: Ben Sneed, Brian Dye, and my dad, Zina. There were probably 50 people lived in Big Piney. My dad's store was by where the store is now. The mill was on the road going east through Piney. We used to shell corn, it had a big wheel on it. We put the corn in a big hopper and it had two little openings to put the corn in it. When we shelled corn, I used to turn that thing a half a day at a time. We ground the corn to make corn meal in a big metal tub.

**OSG:** Did you bag the corn meal?

**Chester:** No. We had a big bin that we poured the corn in after the tub got full and then grind another one and fill the bin. Back then everybody used to make corn bread. You didn't go to the store and buy bread. They'd bring their corn in, the families, to get their corn ground for meal. We sold flour in 25 pound bags and 50 pounds and 100 pounds. Big sacks of flour but we had to buy the flour. We sold food and parts for wagons, you know, wagon wheels, them old wooden wheels. We sold stuff they rolled in the shop where they rolled the metal to go on the wooden wheels. He [the blacksmith] heated the metal to put on the wheels. They had to be put on red hot and it would smoke and then dip them in water to cool them.

We had a big stationary engine and it had a belt on that big wheel, on the pulley, and it run up to the crusher, and then over to the machine where we made corn meal. We had to change the belt from here to here when we changed machines. One of my older brothers, Arthur, he was changing the belt one time and he didn't get the belt all the way on the pulley and it was slapping coming over the pulley and it threw him up against the building, the side wall where the belt run up through there. We had an opening in the wall for the belt because the engine set down and outside. It had two big

enormous wheels, five or six spokes in each wheel. To start that engine, you had to step up on one of those spokes, get it going, and finally it would go over and hit and start running. He failed to get that belt on and it threw him up against the wall and it was slapping him. He was unconscious for ten days. We took him to the hospital. It had a place on top, a big radiator, that you had to keep water in to keep the engine cool. The corn that didn't come off the cob, we had to get that corn off what was left, and throw the cobs over in a big bin, and he fed hogs with the corn that came off the cobs. He had eight or ten hogs underneath the floor, fatten those hogs, and when they got fed he would send them off to market. Once in a while, we would keep one for meat. People would come and get the cobs for wood, to burn in heating stoves, but you had to be careful not to put in too many because the metal on the stoves would get red hot and melt. They had to mix the cobs with wood. They used to come and get those cobs and sack them up. We didn't waste nothing. When we got hungry, we picked peas.

My mother raised chickens for the eggs, we raised our meat, bread from corn meal. We had a

cow we milked for milk. My younger sister lives in Richland. She married Frank McDaniel and her name is Reba. They sell feed in Richland or used to.

*[Two of Chester's brothers and a sister went to California, near Modesto and Santa Cruz, during the Depression.]*

We had a gas pump and we were the first gas station in Big Piney. My dad had the idea to get electric lights so he bought fifteen or twenty dry cell batteries. *[He put them in a] little building and we had something that made electricity that went in those batteries. We were the first ones ever to have electric lights at the store, about 1926. They lit up the whole front and everything. People used to come in there just to see the lights. My dad was smart. That drew business. That was something.*

He had a dynamo or generator that stored [the electricity] in those batteries.

Then we had a ice house. He sold ice. We got the ice from Richland, took the truck, and got the ice in big 300 pound slabs. We had to cut that ice when we sold it off the slabs, twenty-pound, ten-pound at a time. The ice house had insulation all around, and had a door. You opened that door and cut the ice. You had to slide the blocks out, couldn't pick them up with ice tongs.

**OSG:** He was quite an entrepreneur.

**Chester:** Anything to make a dime and it was dimes then, not dollars. I used to pick blackberries, sell blackberries for 15 cents a gallon. I picked peas. When I got all that we wanted, I would pick them for 15 cents a bag for the guy who owned the pea patch. The pea patches were out of town. Everybody had a garden back in those days. I used to hoe potatoes. In the winter time, we would store apples and potatoes. Dig a hole in the ground and have a big mound over them with straw. You put straw over them and put dirt over the straw. Whenever we wanted potatoes,

we would go out and dig them.

There was a little hole where you'd dig in to get them but it kept them all winter.

**OSG:** Did you fish and hunt much?

**Chester:** I used to squirrel hunt and rabbit hunt. We kept them cleaned out. And then we used to go possum hunting.

**OSG:** Did you eat them?

**Chester:** We didn't eat them but a lot of people did. We'd go possum hunting at night and take the hounds out.

**OSG:** Did you gig?

**Chester:** They were gigging in the paddle boats. We had sloughs. My older brothers used to go slough fishing and get big catfish that long. The water was muddy, dirty, and catch them with their hands, grabbing them, noodling.

I went to Bloodland High School. It was a four year high school by then, a two story brick [rock] school building. Did you know the Bell that run the Bell

Hotel in Waynesville? He was my high school teacher. Bell taught at Bloodland. He was the superintendent and then there was another teacher, I forget his name. He was the principal at Bloodland High School. Robert Bell, he was my high school teacher.

**OSG:** The Bell Hotel now is a funeral home, Waynesville Memorial Chapel. The hotel is gone but some of the cabins are still around the grounds and part of the hotel is inside the funeral home.

**OSG:** Do you remember anything about the big tornado?

**Chester:** My dad had a little farm two miles from Big Piney. We had to walk to school in the snow to go to school. Then, after I got older, my dad moved to town in Big Piney. I was just a little guy when the tornado come. We had a smokehouse out by the side of the house when we lived on the farm and we had meat that laid out on big tables that were about the size of a bed. We had smoked meat, hams, shoulders, sides laying out on those tables and the cyclone took our meat and, the little building, it took it all, right beside the house but didn't do anything to the house. My dad had a cellar dug, I guess a hundred feet from the house. When the tornado was coming, we all went and got in that cellar. I remember when my dad was closing the cellar door, the wind blew the cellar door down on his head and knocked him down into the cellar. We had seats around inside the cellar. Sometime we'd go down there and stay all night in that cellar when the storms would come. My older brother was out in the field, riding his horse. He came racing up through that field on that horse, jumped a big high gate and he fell off. It scared the horse to death but it threw my brother off and he hit the ground and we had to go get him and take him to the cellar. The horse knew that storm was coming and was just flying coming down through that field, my brother hanging on for dear life. Dad took us in to Big Piney after the storm and there was stuff all over the road.

*This is an excerpt from an 80 minute interview with Mr. Sneed.*

