

Memories of Hooker

by

Sharlotte Sheldon Smith and Flo Prewett Vaughan



After leaving Basketville at Clementine and continuing west on the old two-lane highway (Route 66) you come to the East end of Hooker.

The first place we remember was Springvale. It had quite a famous dance hall and four cabins. They were two and three rooms that were much in demand during World War II. There was a drilled well with a hand pump, several tall walnut trees and lots of nice grass with plenty of room for camping. There were two little houses way in the back; one had a moon cutout on the door, the other had a sun cutout on it.

Going west on the left, across Hooker Creek, was a two-room shack with rough sawed oak lumber running up and down, metal roof, cardboard, newspapers and anything else they could find to tack up on the wall and ceiling. It had a big spring and a nice garden spot. Two Indians built this shack. They dressed in blankets and one had a feather stuck in the back of his hair. They went around to the neighbors begging for tobacco. I never saw them, but I had heard this story from several different people and thought it might be of interest.

The next place was Ray's store, souvenirs, and garage. The store had three rooms. In the middle was the store, the East end was a bedroom, and the West end was the kitchen. The souvenir stand was separate. *(continued last column)*



Charley Ray's souvenir shop offered the tourist those Ozark items sought after by the city folks. Displayed prominently are baskets made of white oak strips, which might have been supplied by the Childress family two miles to the east or the Wells family two miles to the west on Route 66. Charley Ray also sold Cities Service gasoline. This photo and the one below courtesy of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Rolla Branch, Oral Potere Collection.



Charley Ray was also in the camping and cabin rental business. The large black and white spots are not flaking film emulsion but free ranging chickens. This full service tourist business did not survive the 1942 realignment of Route 66 through Hooker Cut. The new road went behind Ray's location on the original road and the right-of-way took some land.

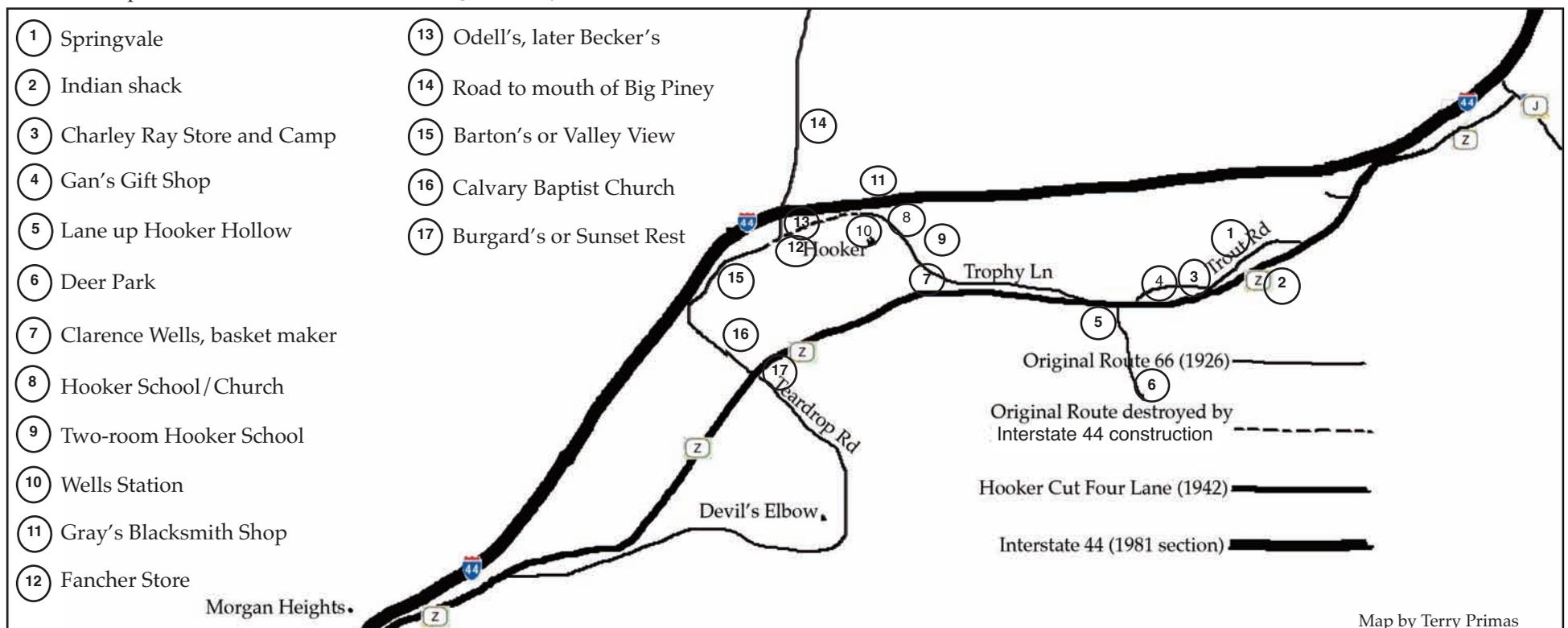


Handwritten across the bottom of this postcard is "Spring at Cities Service Camp Highway 66 near Hooker MO." Printed in the bottom margin is "Charley Ray Hooker, MO." Courtesy Jan and Terry Primas.

It was in an octagon shaped building with a large overhang. During the day they opened up the sides and fastened them to the awning. At night they let the sides down and fastened them on the inside. There were three nice cabins, a drilled well and pump, a camping area, and gas pumps. The garage had a pit dugout to service the cars. The man [Charley Ray] had the first pair of false teeth I ever saw. He stuck them out and scared us kids. One day he emptied a mash onion sack and gave it to my older sister and told her to make herself a bathing suit out of it. Not wanting to be rude she took it home. When Dad asked her what she was doing with the sack, she told him that Mr. Ray told her to make a bathing suit out of it. Dad just hee-hawed.

Just past Ray's store was Gan's. They had souvenirs, baskets, chairs and stools. They also made baskets, chairs, and stools there later on.

Going on West was another little lane





Although probably not the gypsy family mentioned in the memoir and the location is unknown, we didn't want to pass up the chance to reprint this photograph taken by G. E. Ingram of Edgar Springs. Courtesy of the Kohenskey family.

that turned out to the left. There was a nice spring, creek and several fire pits. Lots of people, including gypsies, used this place. The first gypsies had a rubber tired wagon with a tin roof that was pulled by horses. I think they were real gypsies because they were quite colorful. Later there was an old truck with covered roof. There was a bunch of them. I don't know how they all traveled in it. We lived on this same road and always knew when they were at the camp because we could smell the smoke from their fires and we could hear their music. We would be out doing chores and our Dad would tell us to lock up the chicken house. One morning we went out to milk and found that our cows had already been milked. I wondered if the later ones in the trucks were migrant workers, but we still had to lock everything up. We were still not allowed to go near them, so we'd slip up the hill and watch them.

About a mile up this little lane you would come to the Deer Park. The Deer Park was fenced with 14 strands of barbed wire. It was a section (640 acres) of land. After the deer were gone they put in sheep. They took all the sheep out but one old ram. Was he ever mean! He would chase us kids. One time we ran into the log house that was there. He butted the door down and it opened. We got upstairs and he couldn't find us.

Back to the two-lane highway. On the left were four cabins rented to



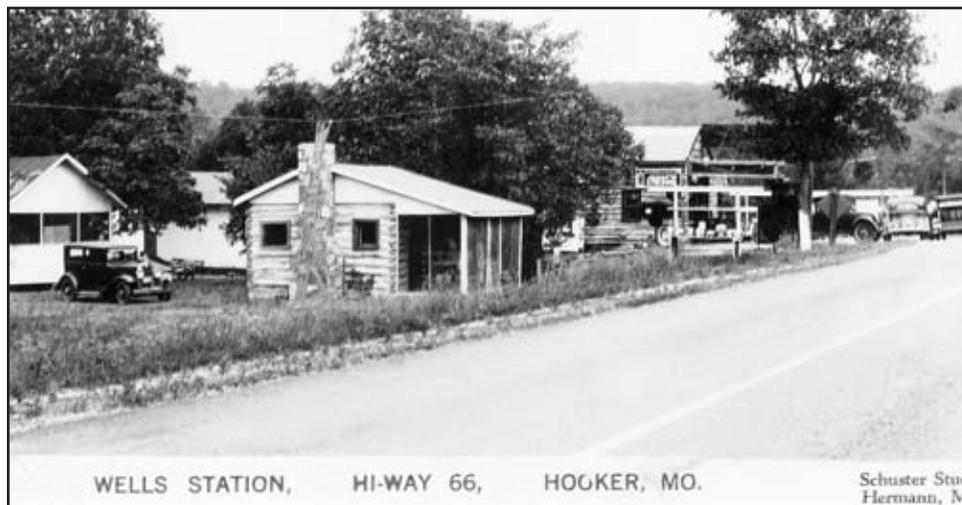
Basketmakers Clarence and Ruth Wells' stone house, still there. Photo by Terry Primas.



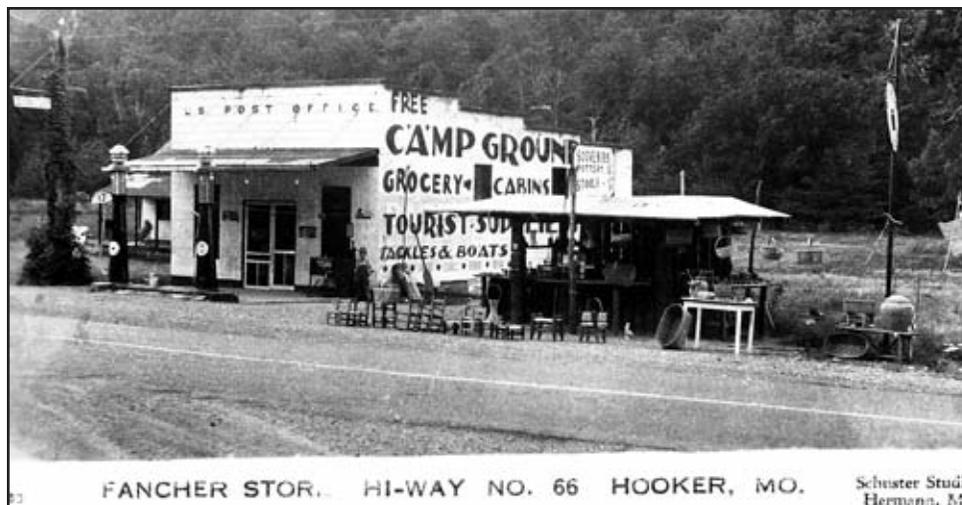
The second school in Hooker. The first one was log and burned down. It is now the Hooker Church. Photograph by Terry Primas.



This two room elementary school was built several hundred feet east of where the church stands now. It was the fourth school built in Hooker. There was also a one room high school for a time across original Route 66. Courtesy of the authors.



Wells Station operated first by Squire and Anna Wells and then son Sterling until the "new" (1942) Route 66 bypassed the business. There was a store, several cabins for rent, and camping. Courtesy of the authors.



Fancher's Store was Hooker's post office 1938-1942. Courtesy of the authors.

summer people. After the highway changed, this became the Wells' property. Going on West on the right was Johnson's. This was a nice restaurant, gas pumps, campgrounds, five cabins, very big house for today. It later was a grocery store and snack bar.

The next place was the Hooker School. The first building was one room. They moved it across the creek and it is now Hooker Church. Today it is owned by the Hooker Cemetery Association. Across from the church was a high school. The last known pupil passed away just two years ago (2009).

Then they built a two room school house. Each room had a wood stove with a jacket around it where we dried out clothes and warmed our lunch. Later they dug a basement and added a floor furnace. We had a nice lunch room and had a cook and janitor.

The next place was Wells [Wells Station]. I remember three cabins and the grocery store, but I don't remember any gas pumps. The store was well stocked and it was the place to be.

Across the road from Well's was Mr. Gray's blacksmith shop. They said if it couldn't be fixed he would build a new one.

Next was Fancher's. They had a grocery store, campgrounds, souvenirs, baskets and the post office. This was a large tall building made of concrete. It was there until the present I-44 went through. Across the road was Odells. I have been told they had a pretty good sized zoo, which would have been quite unique to the area. I remember the Becker's selling their chairs, stools and baskets in this same building.

Just past Odell's a road ran along the Big Piney to the mouth. There were several fishing lodges and summer homes, some on stilts. Most of these places were fairly nice. One place in particular was owned by the Bickel family. We thought Mr. Bickel was Santa Claus. He did all the lighting for



O'Dells Grocery, 1926. The road through Hooker was gravel State Highway 14 before designated Highway 66 in 1926. One of the earliest businesses offering full service for the traveler, including Red Crown Gasoline (Standard Oil), provisions, room and boat rental, and camping supplies. Courtesy of the authors.



When Hooker Cut was constructed in 1942 to relieve the traffic congestion to Fort Leonard Wood, business and life dramatically changed in the community of Hooker. The new section of highway was a divided four-lane highway (the first on the highway in the state) that bypassed the original road through Hooker. Autos were traveling much faster and less likely to stop at roadside shops on the east end and the businesses on the west end were not even seen. Courtesy of Joe Sonderman.



O'Dells became Carl Becker's Ozark basket and furniture workshop. Becker, along with crafters Clarence and Ruth Wells, made Hooker a prime place to buy fine and relatively inexpensive white oak baskets. Courtesy of the authors.



Sterling Wells was operating Wells Station when the new four-lane route through Hooker Cut bypassed the original stretch of the road. Sterling relocated the business to the new highway in 1943 at the mouth of Hooker Hollow. When I-44 bypassed Rt. 66 in 1981, Sterling relocated to the new interstate at the Highway 28 exit. That divided four-lane section which was the first in the state on Route 66 was also the last to close. It became County Road Z. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.



Barton's or Valley View store, located where the Devil's Elbow saw mill currently stands. Courtesy of the authors.



View of Burgard's Sunset Rest, ca. 1933, looking south toward Devil's Elbow. There were several one-room log cabins for tourists. When Hooker Cut was constructed, Sunset Rest was spared and stands at the crossroads of the original road and the new four lane. The store is now a residence. Courtesy of the authors.

the big opera and theaters in Saint Louis. He would bring out the leftover clothing and give it to all of us. Some families took this fine clothing apart and made us some nice clothes and coats out of the material. He would bring us candy and pay us for catching crawdads or digging worms for him. His son had a double winged airplane. The Bickel place along the river was a favorite swimming hole and many baptisms were held there.

The next place was Barton's. This was a really pretty place. It was built out of small stones with ivy growing up its sides. Across the road was a nice spring. They piped the water through a culvert to a pretty rocked up place and the water flowed through the pipe. People traveling Route 66 would fill up their water jugs and water coolers. They had groceries and you could sit at the counter and have a cool soda, a dish of ice cream or a bologna sandwich. What a treat! They had two gas pumps that were gravity fed. You

pumped up as much gas as you wanted to buy. There was a pump that had red gas and another one was purple. I remember three cabins.

The next place on your left was Calvary Baptist Church.

Going on West you came to Burgard's. They had groceries, cabins and gas pumps and lots of cats. She was a ticket agent for Greyhound. She would put an arm up on a pole for the bus to stop.

We have tried to write this as accurate as we remember and have been told. We hope we have not messed it up too bad.

Writing this brought back lots of fond memories. We hope you enjoyed reading our memories.

Sharlotte Sheldon Smith was raised in eastern Hooker. Sharlotte worked for the Pulaski County Library District. **Flo Prewett Vaughan** was born in western Hooker. Flo worked for the Waynesville School District. They both still live in Pulaski County.