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AN OVERVIEW AND MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR CULTURAL
RESOURCES IN THE GREENE COUNTY SEWER
DISTRICT, MISSOURI: 1981

PROJECT: CAR-380

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Resource Management Plan
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by the

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Historical Geography of the Greene County Setting:
The Old Ozarks Frontier

Greene County, Missouri, is within the Ozarks region as defined by geographers, geologists, and historians. The Ozarks is a popular and an historic concept as well as a scholarly one. "Aux Arc," even in the eighteenth century, was the backwoods of the Arkansas River and its tributaries and became synonymous with the hunters' and trappers' hinterland of the rugged highlands between the Arkansas and Missouri rivers. In 1785 the St. Louis trading family, the Chouteaus, went on expeditions to "the Oasark" (Montgomery to Clark, February 18, 1785). Much hunter traffic into that hinterland was along White River, a great tributary of the Arkansas that traverses the highland. Rising in the west-central Ozarks of the Arkansas Boston Mountains, the White River flows northeastward into Missouri and in a great bend turns toward the southeast back into Arkansas. [Greene County lies to the north of the great bend of White River.] The county was settled by those who preferred its more level and fertile mix of high prairie and woodland. In so doing settlers avoided the deeply dissected White River country of steep slopes, rugged terrain, and sinuous bottoms so prone to flooding. [Yet the locus of Greene County--very near to that deep White River Ozarks wilderness and its peculiar game-rich, perpetuated frontier socioeconomy--was to bind the two inextricably into an historic amalgam. Greene County was both supplier and market for the vast scattered population of the upper White River country throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Greene County served a similar function for frontier inhabitants to the west and northwest as well: Indians, prairie pioneers, and soldiers. From the beginning

Ca. 1800-1830: Hillman-Hunter/Refugee Indian Period

As was the case with so many frontiers, the pioneer founders and the first "prominent citizens" celebrated in local histories of Springfield and Greene County were not the first people, nor even the first settlers, in the vicinity. That distinction belongs to white hillmen-hunters-stockmen. They worked their way up the White River from the southeast in Arkansas, following the river's great northern bend into Missouri before it loops back south to its headwaters in the Boston Mountains of Arkansas. Into the Missouri bend of White River empty the major tributaries of Beaver and Swan creeks and James River, whose valleys trend north toward the great forest-prairie ecotone of the northwest Ozarks. Before 1820 early Euro-Americans had moved up these watersheds into what are now Taney, Christian, and Greene counties. Refugee Indians of cis-Mississippi origin were also present, together with whites who were successfully contesting the indigenous Osage for the land. (The Federal Osage removal treaty of 1808 sealed the fate of these storied Indians in Missouri.) Kickapoo were on the prairie which still bears their name; remains of their villages were still on the outskirts of Springfield at its founding. A number of Shawnee and Delaware were present on James Fork (James River) and probably elsewhere before 1818 (large numbers of them were in southeastern Missouri). The St. Mary, Ohio, Treaty of that year set in motion a train of movements of Indians that was to concentrate thousands of them in Southwest Missouri by the mid-1820s. Their villages were established up and down James Fork, generally between the Finley River and Wilson Creek. Their entourage included Shawnee, Wea, Peoria, Piankashaw, and Kickapoo. Also included were traders, freighters,

Greene County was the entrepôt for various frontiers that intersected in Southwest Missouri. A socioeconomy of commercial agriculture, husbandry, trading, mining, processing, and manufacturing developed early and caused the country to remain a principal center for the western Ozarks and prairie plains beyond.]

In 1935 Greene County Planning Board aptly summarized the pioneer situation as they looked back upon it a hundred years later:

Here was a trading post midway between the Osage and the White Rivers, the former navigated to Salt Shoals near the junction of the Glaize River [Camden County], and the latter to Forsyth near the Swan Creek inlet—and between the Mississippi River at St. Louis and the Arkansas River near Ft. Smith, Arkansas (Greene County Planning Board 1935:4-5).

Greene County was itself once a frontier, of course. Preceding the earliest white agricultural pioneers were some 8,000 or more emigrant Indians. The government-subsidized trade with them brought the first merchant-capitalists into the vicinity, of whom the principal was William Gilliss. The Indian trade established the "great interior highway" from Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, to Springfield. Although the eastern leg, or "upper end," was reoriented to St. Louis, the old Indian trade freight route continued to be the primary transportation corridor in the Missouri Ozarks for immigrants and commerce (Morrow 1981c:54-55). It became the route of the United States military road from Jefferson Barracks at St. Louis to Ft. Smith (renamed "The Wire Road" by the 1850s and the era of telegraphy). In the 1860s-70s it was the general route of the first trans-Ozarks railroad.

whiskey runners, smiths, millers, and Federal Indian agents, all serving the needs and desires of these semi-wards of the government and profiting from their large cash annuities. [The Federal government's settlements of money upon the refugee Indians constituted the largest early transfer payments from the public to the private sector by the United States in time of peace. The influence of that money on the capitalization of the frontiers of Southwest Missouri was great, despite the fact that the period of high-density Indian occupancy extended over a period of only some 10 years, from 1822 to 1832.] Their official removal from Missouri changed the socioeconomy that their presence had created; however, not all of the Indians were removed. Many individuals and families remained (as did Cherokee moving through the Missouri Ozarks in the 1830s) to augment the gene pool of the region in succeeding generations (Morrow 1981a:153 ad passim).

The discovery of lead ores at various locales in the Ozarks often attracted the earliest explorers and the earliest "pioneers," if one can use that term to describe the variety of diggers and smelters who worked the widespread deposits with characteristically crude technologies. The Upper White River country was no exception. Knowledge of lead ores in the valley of James Fork preceded the exploration of Henry Schoolcraft and Pettibone. As a matter of fact, knowledge of the lead deposits gave impetus to Schoolcraft's penetration of the Springfield Plateau in 1819. James Fisher and William Holt guided Schoolcraft to several lead mines in the upper James River Valley. At one mine a "rude smelter" had already been erected (Schoolcraft 1819). It was presumed to be the work of Indians. Apparently the Osage had utilized the ore.

required securing clear title to the land through the processes of law and government. Those processes were the prime function of a county, the creation of which was an early order of local politics. An economy and polity necessary for capital accumulation and the increment of value depended upon many factors, most of which proved to be present at the nexus of geography and history where Greene County came to be. The place was a felicitous environment, strategically located for commerce and industry.

The Pioneers' Greene County, 1830-1860

By the early 1830s the Indians as a body were gone from what pioneer Greene Countians still called "the Delaware and Kickapoo country." It was a primitive land yet "flowing with milk and honey," an Edenic frontier paradise (at least in reminiscences of old pioneers):

Wild meat supplied the settlers' table mostly for several years. Some bears still made their winter dens in the country, and deer were so plentiful that a poor shot could have venison any week of the year. The wild turkeys were nearly as tame as chickens Honey was not a luxury The most untrained bee-hunter could find a hollow tree full of honey within a few rods of his cabin The settlers lived for several years without seeing an officer of the law or feeling the restraint of the state or national government. No sheriff or constable had any business in the new community. The affairs at Jefferson City were almost as little known as . . . a foreign capital. The people were a law unto themselves and they did not need the decisions of courts to settle any disagreements (Fullbright-Weaver Papers, n.d.).

Settlers on the Kickapoo Prairie--an especially attractive area to early arrivals--sometimes rented lands from the Kickapoo and Delaware and founded livestock herds by purchasing hogs and cattle from the Indians (Morrow 1981c). For years the Kickapoo Prairie was a favorite resting place for new arrivals, who camped there while scouting possible permanent settlement sites.

The extinction of Indian claims cleared at once all previous shadows of land titles in the area and saved Greene Countians from undergoing the protracted litigation over land claims, grants, absentee ownership, etc. that plagued many Missouri counties. The location of the county seat at Springfield proved to be permanent; debate over another location did not extend beyond the 1830s (Morrow 1981c). In January 1833, Greene County was formed by local community leaders and politicians. The following year, postal service was begun in Springfield, and Missouri adopted its first "occupancy laws," intended to secure entry rights to early settlers (Gates 1970:45). In 1835 a new Federal land office opened in Springfield. Basic arrangements were then in place to accommodate settlement in the upper White River country. These fortuitous events within the space of a few years were a boon to the county.

From the 1830s, Greene County and Springfield were the most populous, the most wealthy, and economically and culturally the most advanced county and town of Southwest Missouri and of the whole Ozarks region.

Greene County was organized in 1833 in reponse to a large migration of settlers into Southwest Missouri between about 1828 and 1837. It was a local phenomenon of rapid new settlement which was a microcosm of a much larger occurrence: the great westward explosion of population in the United States. The State of Missouri, as revealed by the censuses, really was the gateway to the trans-Mississippi west. As a matter of fact, Missouri was regarded in that generation as the West of opportunity for yeoman farmer and bourgeois entrepreneur alike. Excepting only the State of Louisiana, Missouri from the time of its earliest census (1810) possessed the largest population of any trans-Mississippi territory or state before the Civil War, and

by 1840 it surpassed Louisiana. Between 1830 and 1840, Missouri increased in population from ca. 140,000 to ca. 384,000. In 1830 the five United States Land Offices in the state were all along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, as was the majority of the population. The frontier was not yet far beyond those rivers. In 1835 the sixth U.S. Land Office was opened in Springfield, indicative of the fact that population was surging into the southwestern interior of the state (Third-Eighth Censuses of the U.S., 1810-1860; Shortridge, 1980; Figure 14).

Greene County was essentially an ecotonal environment, a boundary zone between different subregions of the Ozarks. Specifically it was on the Springfield Plateau, a level-to-rolling to gently dissected province with a mixed prairie and forest. To the north and east was the Eureka Springs Escarpment, a scarp facing away from the plateau and dropping into a different, more heavily forested, and generally less fertile province (the Salem or Central Plateau). To the south the Springfield Plateau broke off precipitously into the White River drainage (Sauer's "White River Hills"), a heavily forested, deeply dissected province of steep relief, thin soils, narrow valley floors, and other characteristics in striking contrast. [The county embraced a series of interconnecting bands and zones of prairie and forest, both level to gently rolling, drained by the headwaters of numerous creeks and rivers. Wilson Creek and James Fork lay in an arc from east to southwest of Springfield in a shallow, fertile valley which included the Delaware villages, some dozen miles southwest. To the north and west lay the headwaters of the Sac and Pomme de Terre drainages which flow to the Missouri River, while those to the south all flow to the White River. The divide between major watersheds thus ran across the county, a geographic

factor propelling the city of Springfield towards its role as a center for radiating trade routes (Steyermark 1959; Sauer 1920).

The matter of those trade routes is perhaps the most important single element in the location and early development, and of the subsequent history, of Springfield as the central place for Greene County and finally for a large trade region. The great overland route from Ste. Genevieve, St. Louis, the Maramec mines, and any other eastern terminuses emerged upon the Springfield Plateau near present Northview, entered the valley of the upper James River some 20 miles east-northeast of the town site, continued to the town site (where it intersected the road going north to Boonville), there turned sharply southward (apparently along the western edge of the Kickapoo Prairie), and ran on to its destination at Delaware Town and connections on the great bend of White River. The 1834 surveyor (and other early sources) refer to this road not as "the St. Louis Road," as might be expected, but as "the Old White River Road" (or Trace). The Boonville Road was the main connection between Southwest Missouri and the Boonslick region of the Missouri River country. Thus, these two roads were the most important trafficways in the southwest quadrant of Missouri. The precise routes of these two earliest roads are uncertain, but they finally intersected in Springfield, which was in every sense the gateway to the developing region of Southwest Missouri and to a lesser degree of Northwest Arkansas. Springfield was a connecting point between Missouri and the White River, and its own immediate hinterland was richly endowed with resources for a commercial agriculture.

The patterning of early white settlement is suggested by contemporary maps, especially the earliest GLO survey maps. Both dispersed improvements and villages seem characteristically to have been sited at the borders between prairie and forest (Figures 15-22).

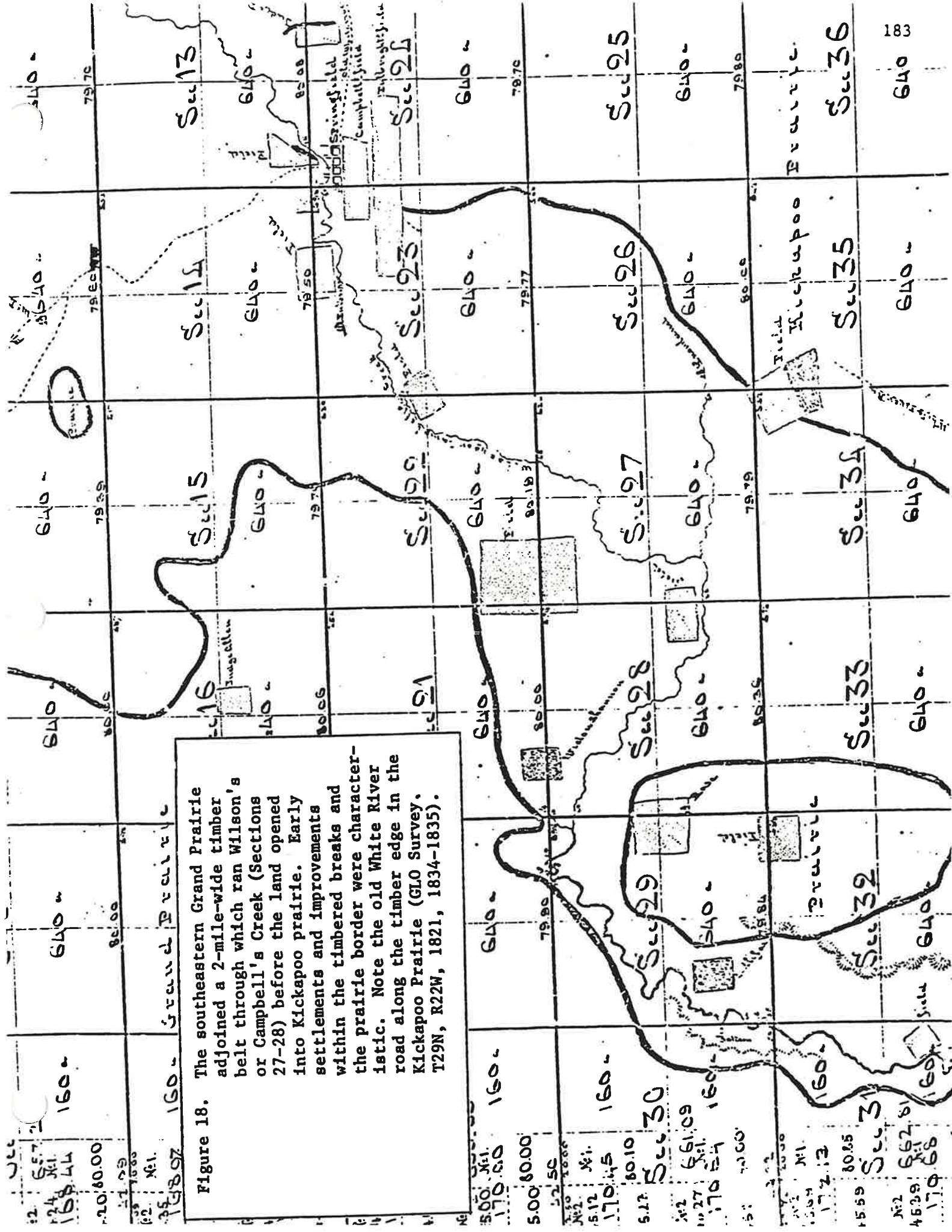


Figure 18. The southeastern Grand Prairie adjoined a 2-mile-wide timber belt through which ran Wilson's or Campbell's Creek (Sections 27-28) before the land opened into Kickapoo prairie. Early settlements and improvements within the timbered breaks and the prairie border were characteristic. Note the old White River road along the timber edge in the Kickapoo Prairie (GLO Survey, T29N, R22W, 1821, 1834-1835).

For example, at the head of Pierson Creek (Figure 22) on a small prairie pocket, land purchased and developed by New England pioneer Josiah Danforth and his descendants remains one of Greene County's significant historic locales. "Walnut Forest" was a post office (and an abortive bidder to be the county seat), a travelers' stop on the St. Louis-White River road, including Cherokee migrants of the late 1830s on their "trail of tears," an antebellum slave plantation, a ranch for stockraising, and in the twentieth century the Okino dairy, the county's largest. The great federal-style brick house (built 1847-49 and modeled on the first Mrs. Danforth's middle Tennessee home) has been carefully preserved to the present by Danforth's descendants, all women.

Springfield, the earliest village, was ever the chief center of the county. Its locational history is at present the best documented and may serve as a model in the context of this writing (as it doubtless served for neighboring settlements then). Springfield came into existence because a group of several families settled in the immediate vicinity of the corner of Sections 13, 14, 23, and 24, T29N, R22W of the Fifth Principal Meridian, near the intersection of the Boonville Road and the Old White River trace (Figure 18).

The choice of the location is credited inferentially to John Polk Campbell and E.M. Campbell, brothers from Maury County, Tennessee, who in 1827 were in Northwest Arkansas and Southwest Missouri to spy out land for settlement, perhaps among other errands. They sheltered at Delaware Town in the autumn, and were guided by a Kickapoo up Wilson Creek to the edge of Kickapoo Prairie. They liked the multiple springs, the prairie-timber ecotone, and especially the celebrated "natural well," a sinkhole opening