



HERCULANEUM HISTORY

Herculaneum (The Legacy of a Pioneer Missouri Town)



The first settler at the mouth of the Joachim Creek arrived in 1799. John Conner built his homestead where the stream is now crossed by a bridge at old U.S. 61-67.

Church historians trace the Methodist and Baptist missionary work back to 1807. One Methodist circuit rider, John Travis was especially active near the landing, where a man named Wideman maintained a ferry across the Mississippi River and a bridge across the Joachim Creek near its mouth. By 1808,

Wideman had sold his property to Jeduthan Kendall. Moses Austin and Sammuel Hammond purchased 400 acres of land at the mouth of Joachim Creek from Jeduthan Kendall and in 1809 laid out a town which Moses Austin named Herculaneum.

The Missouri Gazette reported that Herculaneum had a hemp rope factory in those days called a “Rope Walk”. The ferry across the Mississippi was eventually run by Elisha Ellis, a blacksmith, and with his wife Phoebe, he also maintained an Inn. During this time in 1809, a French refugee named John Maclot built the first successful shot tower west of the Mississippi River in Herculaneum. A year later, Joseph Austin built the second shot tower. Herculaneum was described in the news as a town of twenty houses with two hundred inhabitants, a ferry, a store, a blacksmith and a hatter.



In 1813, Colonel Hammond offered for sale in Herculaneum 221 lots for \$30 each and other land which he valued at \$3,000. Chris Wilt established the store in Herculaneum where he sold the lead candles and soap he manufactured in St. Louis and the alcoholic beverages he manufactured at this distillery on the L'Abbe Creek in Cahokia, Illinois. He and John Honey erected the third shot tower at the northern end of Herculaneum.



The first school was established in Herculaneum by a man named Wilson in 1815. In 1817, the “Zebulon Pike” steamboat was the first to navigate the upper Mississippi River and docked at Herculaneum on its way to St. Louis. The crew had to help the boat along with the use of poles when going upstream, but after the first visit they made regular stops at the Herculaneum port. Also in 1817, workers quarrying stone for the

Herculaneum home of John Honey cut and placed petroglyphs (footprints) on the outside of his chimney wall.

The 1818 publication of the magazine called Schoolcraft described Herculaneum as having between thirty and forty houses, three stores, a post office, jail, court building, and a school. There were three shot towers on the adjoining cliffs, and a tanyard for curing leather, a distillery and a flour mill in the vicinity.



At this same time, parts of St. Louis and Ste. Genevieve Counties were used to establish the county of Jefferson, where the first court convened on March 19, 1819. William Bates, Peter McCormack, Thomas Evans, Henry Metz, Jacob Wise and William Null, were appointed by Frederick Bates, acting Governor, as the commission to select the county seat. They chose the town of Herculaneum.

James Rankin, John Geiger and John Finley were appointed county commissioners. The County Constitution was adopted in 1820 and Daniel Dunklin and Samuel Perry were elected the first State Senators, while Nathaniel Beverly Tucker was the first judge to preside in Jefferson County. The first justices of the county court were L.B. Boyd, Elias Bates and Samuel Hammond. Their first meeting was held in the rented home of a colored man by the name of Abe, on October 1, 1821. On May 14, 1821, L.B. Boyd, Elias Bates and Samuel Hammond organized the first Jefferson County Court at Herculaneum. They named James Rankin clerk, John Finley coroner/sheriff, James Rankin, a tavern owner, was appointed county surveyor, William Bates was given a merchants license, and Elisha Ellis was licensed to run the ferry across the Mississippi River at Herculaneum. The first Jefferson County jail was built by Josiah Craft in Herculaneum in 1821 on land donated by James Bryant and his wife Emily for public buildings. Emily was the daughter of Moses Austin.

On May 3, 1823, Paul Wilhelm, Duke of Wurttemberg, arrived in Herculaneum on the Cincinnati Railroad. Quotes from his account are as follows:

"At nine o'clock a.m. we landed at Herculaneum, a lead foundry which delivers an excellent quality of metal. The lead mines are farther inland. The shot factory here furnishes all sizes of shot. I purchased lead here for my distant journey.

The little settlement, consisting of scarcely twenty houses, is most romantic, being near a truly imposing group of cliffs of varying shapes; some entirely devoid of all vegetation. Framed by hills, the valleys back of the little place are swampy; a deep lake is shaded by willows, nut trees, and sumac. A multitude of song birds sing out."

***Excerpts Duke Paul Wilhelm travels 1822-24.
University of Oklahoma Press – 177***

In order to make the trip to the County Courthouse a days ride on horseback from anywhere in the county, the County Court voted in 1832 to move the County Seat to a more central place in the County; Hillsboro. This move happened in 1840.

The 1876 McDonough/Brink Atlas of Jefferson County shows a tract of land, Survey 3028, containing 340.28 acres belonging to C.S. Rankin, where Herculaneum once stood. It shows one building on this tract in the general area of the present Dunklin/Fletcher Park.

**The Phoenix
(Herculaneum Rises Again)**



Like the fabled Phoenix of mythology, Herculaneum was rebuilt from the ashes of the past. Tied to the growth of St. Joe factory was the revival of the town of Herculaneum. A main street was chosen and homes, schools, churches, a company store, post office, depot and hotel were built as the need arose. Herculaneum gradually took its place among the better towns in Missouri.

In 1864 the St. Joe Lead Company, a New York based firm, was organized to produce lead in the Missouri Lead Belt area. Through good management and adaptation of modern methods of mining and smelting, the St. Joe Company became the largest producer of lead in Missouri by 1887. By this time, St. Joe decided that it needed a shorter route between the lead deposit, the ultimate market for the lead, and the source of mine mill and smelter supplies. It is interesting that eighty years earlier Moses Austin chose the site of Herculaneum for the same reason.

The MR/BT railroad was built through Herculaneum in May, 1887 to accommodate the transportation necessary for the lead production process. It crossed Big River near Bonne Terre, ran up Bee Run, the full length of the Platin Valley, then on to Herculaneum. From there, a line intersected with the Iron Mountain Railroad at Riverside. These early railroads were narrow gauge.

In 1887, St. Joe Lead Company purchased a 540 acre tract of land with over a mile of river frontage on which to locate its new lead smelter. Construction of the new lead smelter began in 1890 and took two years to build. The first operation of the smelter began in 1892, with two blast furnaces, a refinery, a power house for generation of steam and electric, and calcine furnaces so that the process could be accomplished using coal rather than wood. New equipment and advanced methods in smelting made the company and the town very successful.

A “Company Town”

As the St. Joe Lead Company prospered in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the town of Herculaneum prospered as well. The town truly became a “Company Town”. The paternalistic company basically owned the town and provided every need for the residents free of charge. The towering 350 foot smokestack of the company’s lead smelter was not only a symbol of jobs for the town’s residents, but also meant that homes, lights, streets, sewers and fire protection would be provided. The company was responsible for building and maintaining the town’s sewer system and also building and maintaining most of the town’s streets. With the St. Joe Lead Company providing most of

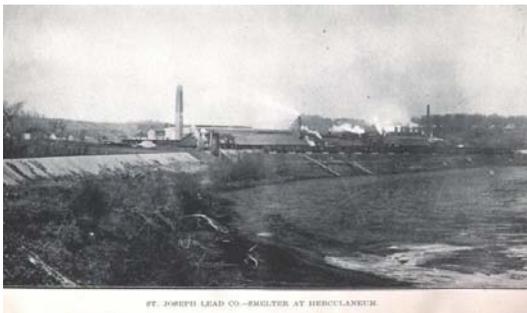


the town's infrastructure and providing most of the town's public services, there was not a need for any type of tax to be levied against the town's residents (except for public schools). As the town enjoyed a time of prosperity, the population of the town continued to increase. With the increase in population, came the need for a public school system and the organization of several churches inside the town's boundaries. The town of Herculaneum and the St. Joe Lead Company continued to grow through the early years of the 20th century. For the most part, what was good for the company was equally good for the town.

Change is in the Wind

Tough times hit the town of Herculaneum during the Depression years between 1929 and 1933. For the most part, the town of Herculaneum was closed down. Jobs were at a premium with only the lead company keeping a few employees working. The company actually demolished some of the older buildings in town in order to provide work for some of their employees. Some employees were given jobs through the Works Progress Administration which provided for the construction of the football and track field at the public school and retaining walls in the town. Following the Depression, both the company and the town rebounded. The downtown area bustled with several businesses, the school system continued to grow and the plant continued to expand.

As the years went by, the company began to slowly sever the close ties and dominance it had on the town. Many of the company owned homes were sold to employees and other residents and all company owned stores were closed. With no formal town government in place, the company still provided most of the maintenance and construction of the town's infrastructure and other public services. In the early 1960s, a group of concerned citizens formed an organization known as the "Citizens for the Improvement of Herculaneum". This group was responsible for several improvements in the town including a street light program, street signage and other infrastructure improvements. Eventually, this group became the guiding force behind the efforts to incorporate the town of Herculaneum into a fourth class city. By this time, the town of Herculaneum had grown past the original boundaries of the town with new homes being built to the south and north of the older company part of town. Unfortunately, much of the historic downtown area began to fade in the late 1950s and 1960s with many buildings being vacated, never to be occupied again.



With the St. Joe Lead Company playing such a large part in the lives of Herculaneum residents, there was never a need to incorporate the town. However, as the lead company sought to sever their control of the town, it was evident that new methods of supporting the town had to be found. Looking to the future, the citizens group acted upon articles of incorporation first filed in the early 1820s, and sought re-incorporation of Herculaneum in the early 1970s. In 1972, the town of Herculaneum was

officially re-incorporated in the State of Missouri as a fourth class city. The City held its first election in 1972 to elect a Board of Aldermen, a City Marshal, a City Clerk and a Municipal Judge.

In the late 1970s, the residential area of Herculaneum continued to shift to the south and west with the development of the Westchester subdivision to the west of Scenic Drive. Much of this new growth could be attributed to the construction of Interstate 55 which when built formed

much of the City's western border. With time, the City of Herculaneum continued to expand to the west of Interstate 55 and now includes the residential development of the Prairies at Friedburg and will eventually include the Providence and Stonewater developments.

In the early 1990s, a prolonged labor strike occurred in Herculaneum that in retrospect has had a tremendous impact on the City and its one-time largest employer. With the eventual demise of the labor union at the St. Joe Lead Company (by then known as the Doe Run Company) many long time employees who were Herculaneum residents were forced to find employment outside the City. Although the Doe Run Company continues to be a major supporter of the Herculaneum schools and other Herculaneum organizations, the once heavy paternalistic role the lead company played in the community has never been the same. At the present time, only a few employees at the Doe Run Company are Herculaneum residents.

Lead Contamination (The Phoenix Must Rise Again)



Even more damaging to the City of Herculaneum was the lead contamination issues that surfaced in 2001. Under pressure from various governmental agencies and citizens, the Doe Run Company was forced into a voluntary buyout program. Many of the homes in the historic part of town were deemed lead contaminated and the company was forced to

offer buyout incentives to the residents. With the conclusion of the buyout program in 2005, many homes in the immediate area of the lead company have been vacated and remain empty to this day. Several organizations and governmental groups along with the Doe Run Company are studying what the future of the historic part of town will be. While there are hints of industrial parks, commercial areas and recreational areas in the buyout zone, only time will tell what the eventual fate of historic downtown Herculaneum will be.

Despite the lead contamination issues, the City of Herculaneum continues to grow and prosper in the newer areas of the City. Commercial development along the Interstate 55 corridor continues to take place with the promise of even more development in the future. Herculaneum has faced dire times in the past and has always been able to reestablish itself quite nicely. Once again, the City of Herculaneum is in a position to be a major economical and residential center in Jefferson County.