

Ozark National Scenic Riverways

Taped Interview of

Oscar Barton

by

Neil C. Mangum, Historian

Ozark National Scenic Riverways

Missouri

May 19, 1973

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OZARK NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAYS

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Ozark National Scenic Riverways
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I hereby give and relinquish to Ozark National Scenic Riverways a unit of the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, as a donation for such historical and educational purposes as the Riverways shall determine, the tape recording and their contents listed below:

Frank Oscar Boston

Name of narrator

Summersville MO

Address of narrator

Neil C. May

Name of interviewer

Ozark National Scenic Riverways

Address of interviewer

Date May 19-1978

Subject of tape(s): Alley Spring Mill

Editor's Note:

Oscar Barton spent much of his early youth at Alley Spring during the zenith of Alley's economic-social influence. His description into the appearance of the Mill and surrounding buildings provides us with a highly detailed account of the area. It is interesting to compare what little pictorial evidence we have of the area with his description and discover that he is highly accurate in his account.

It should be noted that the final typed copy of the transcript varies only slightly from the original draft. Most changes involved correcting dates and errors in name spelling. On several occasions he corrected grammatical errors such as using the verb tense "seen" instead of its proper form "saw". At Mr. Barton's request the phrase "old man" has been deleted from the names of people. Mr. Barton felt this might be interpreted as a derogatory remark which was not really intended.

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- M. Mr. Barton, in what year were you born?
- B. In 1895. The 27th day of November.
- M. It's been a long time.
- B. Yes. I'll be 83 years this November.
- M. When you were growing up here, when can you first remember the mill? About three or four years old?
- B. Yes. I know I can remember it when I was five years old because, well, kids didn't travel much then because all we had to go on then was the team and wagon. (Laughter)
- M. As far as the mill, can you recall who owned the mill when you were growing up?
- B. Yes. Fritz Laymeyer owned it and then Byrd Boyd owned it and then a fellow by the name of Phillips owned it and Babcock run it. His daughter lives up there at Summersville. She is 85 years old. Then. J. M. Knott bought it and they had it for 10 years, from 1902 till 1912 and then, of course, they sold it to this company in Kansas City.
- M. Did you ever work at the mill itself?
- B. No. I played around here a lot, but I never worked. A fellow by the name of Johnson came down here and run this farm for awhile and didn't do any good, and then the Gates' leased it. I think they were here about three years. I don't remember. Did Bill say how long they were here?
- M. Yes. I believe he said he was here from about 13 to 15.
- B. Yes, well.....

- M. And I guess his father ran the general store for awhile.
- B. No, his brother, Bass. (Laughter) That is where he lost his shirt.
- M. (Laughter)
- B. His Dad did.
- M. Do you remember this mill as far as what it mainly produced. I know it was a roller mill. Did it mainly grind up flour?
- B. Flour and meal. Edmond Knott run it. That was J.M.'s youngest son. He run the mill all the time, taking care of it. He had Charlie taking care of the farm. They farm quite a bit here.
- M. How long did you live here at Alley?
- B. How long did I live here at Alley? I left Alley in 1915.
- M. So you were 20 years here. Then where did you go?
- B. Well, I went to Springfield to school and in 1915 I went to Webb City. My wife and I was married in Webb City in 1917 and our oldest daughter was born there. We have four daughters and our oldest daughter was born there in Webb City. Then we went from there to north Missouri. Well, not north, it was actually central Missouri. It was north of the Missouri River, in Montgomery County. My father and mother came from Montgomery County down here.
- M. Do you remember the flood? It seems to me they had a big flood in 1915.
- B. In 1904 and 1914.
- M. They had two of them then.
- B. 1904 was the big flood cause I'll tell you what you could do. You could start over there.....Do you know where the Drewell place is over there?
- M. No, sir.
- B. Across the river, and run a boat right up to the store out here.
- M. (Laughter). Wow! I know the general store had a story that it was washed out a couple of times.

- B. Oh, yes, but the big flood....I have seen a lot of floods of course, but the big flood was in 1904. Of course, when my mother and father lived up at Alley Holler here, why that - - actually washed this store and things away here. Not the river because it backed up here. The river backed up here.
- M. Was the mill sort of a center of social activity for the Alley community? When people would come here would they all sort of congregate here?
- B. Oh, yes. They'd come here and camp out here and get their grinding done with their flour and their meal. They had a great big bin over there with the meal, a great big bin.
- M. What was the....can you recall the color of the building?
- B. All that I remember was white. Now, it might have been...it might have had a trim on it, but I don't remember any trim. It was all white.
- M. Okay. I want to ask you some questions about the dam. Can you remember what the dam looked like?
- B. Well, it was almost a solid, earth top to it. There were rocks in there but we used to....you could walk over there anytime you wanted to. There wasn't anything to keep you from it. It did not have these breaks in it here. Neither one of them.
- M. It was all solid. I guess the spillways then were put in later. Later on.
- B. Yes. I don't remember any spillways. I don't know how they kept it from running over and washing it out but I guess they let it all go through there. The forebay there.....I don't know how they get all that through there, do you?
- M. No, I don't. How many gates were on the forebay?
- B. There was never any more than just that one.
- M. Only just one. How was that operated?
- B. Well, they operate with a windlass. Like one of these old well windlasses.

M. Interesting. How many other buildings were there in the Alley community besides the mill here and the general store? Do you recall?

B. Oh, I don't know how many there were but there were a lot more than there is now. I would say there was about 25 or 30.

M. What kind of population did you have here?

B. Oh, I don't know....there never was over 100 people here, I'm sure. In my time there were a lot more houses than there is now.

M. Where did you live in Alley?

B. We lived up in the hollow here about half a mile.

M. About half a mile.

B. They own it. They bought it. They own every acre of land that my dad owned here and every foot of land that my wife's dad owned here.

M. By "they", do you mean the state?

B. Well, no, the state didn't buy it. The Ozark National Riverways bought it.

M. Okay. We got it from the state.

B. Yes.

M. Do you recall the blacksmith shop that used to be here?

B. Oh, yes. My dad worked there for years and years. He was not a blacksmith. He was a woodworkman. And then, Mac Ellman worked there for a long time.

M. What kind of work did it do, the blacksmith shop?

B. Well, they done blacksmithing and woodwork. That, my dad followed as his trade. In fact, he worked for Cord and Fischer. He used to back north of Birch Tree there for 20 years. And, he worked for Missouri Lumber and Mining Company. He worked for the Kollers and he did a lot of custom work here. Jack Smith leased that from this corporation here that owned it and he rented it to Mac Ellerman and my dad for a dollar a month.

M. (Laughter). Wow!

B. (Laughter)

M. Do you recall there being any vehicles, any motor vehicles, automobiles?

B. Well, the first one I ever seen was when Doc Wallen came down from Summersville and that is the first automobile I ever saw in Alley.

M. What year was that?

B. I would say that that was about 1912.

M? Did you go to school here in Alley?

B. Oh, yes. My wife and I went to school here. I never went to any other grade school or any other country school but Alley School.

M. Where was this school located?

B. That there motel up there, that is the last one they built, but they first built a log schoolhouse. I've got pictures of that log schoolhouse.

M. Where is that?

B. It is just above the motel up there.

M. That would be the old Brewer Motel?

B. Yes. I went there in 1914 and 1915. Those were the only two years I went there. My wife, too.

M. Tell me about the sawmill that used to be attached to the building.

B. Well, we had logs sawed here on it.

M. How big of logs could it saw?

B. Oh, they would have anywhere from 10 to 12 inches.

M. Who ran that?

B. I don't know whether I.....I don't think Edmond did.

M. Somebody was telling me, it seems to me that Toby Williams.....

B. Well, Toby Williams did saw here some all right. He followed that business quite a lot in his life and he was a good hand to keep up a saw and I am satisfied that.....but there was somebody that sawed here before Toby ever come here. That is Peggy's dad.

- M. Can you tell me anything about the old general store?that sat just south of the mill here? Do you recall who ran?...I think you did tell me who ran that, but, what kind of goods they stocked and everything?
- B. Well....(laughter).
- M. What the interior was furnished in? I know that is going way back. (Laughter)
- B. Well, it wasn't too well furnished and it wasn't too well stocked.
- M. (Laughter)
- B. The first fellow that I remember, and that was before my time, was Harry Richards, come down here. They had a store in Summersville for years. Richards did. E. H. Charles and Company it was called. He had the store down here the first time, and, let's see, there was Clint Williams and J. M. Knotts. Old man Sam Branson had a store here, too. His daughter out here at Birch Tree got a picture of them.
- M. Oh, really?
- B. Yes, and then old man....I had his name awhile ago. Isn't it awful when you can't think of it? Joe Dar's father....you remember Joe Dar's father....had a store here. And then Fona Greggs had a store here and then, of course, Mr. Knotts was here 10 years.
- M. Is this the same store you are referring to or were there two or three other stores?
- B. Well, that other picture there gives the store that Knotts had here.
- M. I take it that this store was, well, that this one came first.
- B. Yes, yes. That is right. Now, that store was there when Knotts came here. I think Mr. Knotts rebuilt this. They used to have a dance hall up there.
- M. They had a dance hall?
- B. Yes.

- M. Talking to other people, Alley was sort of the center of social activity with picnics and everything.
- B. Oh, yes.
- M. Can you recall what some of those were like? What the activities were?
- B. Well, they had a lot of dancing and merry-go-rounds and ice cream stands. My dad had an ice cream stand here for I don't know how many years, and Ruth's dad had it for....Blackburn, Bill Blackburn.
- M. Homemade ice cream?
- B. Homemade ice cream.
- M. How about sports like basketball, football or baseball.
- B. Yes. They would play baseball right out there where that schoolhouse is. Right in there. And, we had basketball out there. I played on a basketball team when we beat Summersville up there. Of course, we thought we was doing something then. (Laughter).
- M. (Laughter)
- B. Cause, they had a high school up there.
- M. Alley never did have a high school. You just had a grade school?
- B. Here? Yes. They had a Jobe High School here after my time.
- M. What did you call it? A Job.....?
- B. Jobe High School.
- M. That is the name of it?
- B. Yes, Jobe High School. I tell you, Vernon Wilkens who lives up there in that Flatrock neighborhood, he went to that school. He stayed over there at Charlie Akers' and went to school. He married a Drewel girl, Augusta Drewel.
- M. Yes, I have seen some pictures of her.
- B. She married Wilbur Adaire. Charlie has been dead for several years and she married Wilbur Adaire. They live over there in Dillardville.
- M. Has this spring every gone dry? Do you ever recall it going dry?

- B. Well, it almost did stop running at one time and, I guess, stayed that way for about 24 hours. I wasn't here when that happened but of course, my mother and father lived here, and the Drewells and the Blackburns and McCormicks. The McCormicks homesteaded this land. In fact, one of the McCormicks owned this property at one time.
- M. When was that when it went dry? What year?
- B. I don't know. Let's see. I left here in 1915 and it must....I'm not going to say because I don't know just exactly when it went dry, but it...I went to Webb City and I went from there to Montgomery County. I was up there two years working in the mines there. It was, I imagine, around 1914 or 1915. No, no, it wasn't. No. No. It was about.....it is either 1916 or 1917.
- M. You mentioned earlier that you went to grade school here and your wife did, too. She was a local girl, too?
- B. Oh, yes.
- M. What was her.....?
- B. Well, she came here in 1904.
- M. What was her name?
- B. Ruth Blackburn. Harvey Staples bought the land he owned here and it was her father's place. He had half a section of land in here, 320 acres. They came here in 1904 and she was nine years old when they came here.
- M. What kind of crops did the farmers around here grow?
- B. About the only things were corn and wheat.
- M. Corn and wheat?
- B. Yes.
- M. You don't see much wheat around here any more.
- B. No. You don't see hardly any wheat or hardly any corn anymore.
- M. Where was the cemetery located for Alley?

- B. Over....you been to....of course, you come up here...on that hillside up there. That is the Alley cemetery.
- M. Okay. Just on the other side of the river.
- B. Yes. My wife's grandad and she has a brother buried there. And then, John Blackburn....I know you've heard talk about John Blackburn and Joe Smith killing John Blackburn. I've got his picture there. He is buried over there. It was 1905, the 27th day of September.
- M. You were still here at the time when the logging industry was still going?
- B. Oh, yes. Yes. Missouri Lumber and Mining Company cut all that timber, well, you know where that is? That big hill up there where dad lives. I used to go up there with those men that haul those logs. They hauled them down and dumped them down by the mouth to Horse Hollow and then they took a big crane and loaded them on the flatcars. You see, that comes down Horse Hollow. That tram there, that log road.
- M. Do you remember what kind of wages people were getting when they worked for the lumber company?
- B. Well, (laughter) they didn't get very high...I know, I had a brother-in-law that married my oldest sister, Dave Lancaster, that worked for Missouri Lumber and Mining Company and he was one of the highest priced men that worked there. (Laughter) He got a dollar and seventy-five cents a day.
- M. A dollaryseventy-five a day?
- B. Pulled all the first grade lumber and throwed it down the chute and they run it through dry kilns.
- M. How did they get the lumber out of the woods? How did they get it off the hillsides?
- B. With log wagons and mules. They had four-horse teams. You can't imagine how high that hill is and they would go up there with those four-horse teams. Of course, they would load it with the leaders and then they would come down

that hill and lock the two hind wheels and the one front wheel.

M. Boy, that must have been tricky to get that down the hill.

B. Yes. (Laughter). I wasn't just too old when they were doing that but I drove one of those mules and I got off and walked down the hill. (Laughter)

M. (Laughter). West Eminence was a pretty good size town at one time there. It had a good size population.

B. Well, West Eminence...a lot of people live in West Eminence. That was where that mill was. They build their company houses and rented them. I remember when my sister and her husband were down there, they lived in a tent.

M. The road from Alley now to Eminence does follow that same road as it did then?

B. Pretty well. Pretty well the same road. Old McCormick Hill, they used to call it there. That was the roughest thing where it was all rock and it seemed like....

M. McCormick Hill, is that the great one in the valley here?

B. Yes, yes. And then, it went around to West Eminence and come in...I really don't know where that Red Hill is there. They call it Red Hill. It went around through West Eminence. And then, they used to go down the river here. See, they would go down there and cross the spring branch and they would have to cross the Jacks Fork.

M. Yes.

B. Old man Masterson, when he was here, got enough money from the county to shoot that bluff off. They had to row down that way, too. They went down by the Gregory place. I don't know if you know where the Gregory Place is?

M. I've heard of it.

B. It is where they have these trails rides down there.

M. Okay.

B. The Mortons all lived in there. There were three families of the Mortons. There was Austin, George and Elmer. There were the Keatons and, I think,

Lancaster. Bill Lancaster's boy had that and Jim Plowman and this gal that I was telling you about here that is still living. She lived down there... Effie Smith.

M. How about the road to Summersville? Is that basically the same?

B. No, no. It went up to Hollow. It went up the Hollow to the hill up there. They called it the "S" hill. It was actually an "S" coming down there.

M. What hollow is that you are talking about?

B. Oh, it's Alley Hollow.

M. It went up Alley Hollow?

B. Yes.

M. Okay. Today it sort of goes around....if you go like you are going to Summersville you would be going around to the right of that.

B. Yes, yes. Old man Sam Branson's, and then, see, these Gates boys that you were talking about, his father and Node Wheker had a sawmill up there in 1905, and sawed a a lot of this timber from Masterson who owned a...I don't know what he owned...I think a thousand or two acres in here. They cut that off for him. They had a ferry boat over there that took them across Jacks Fork.

M. A ferry boat?

B. Yes. I've got a picture of it. I forgot to bring it.

M. What kind of a road was it? Was it just a dirt road or was it....?

B. It was just an old dirt road going up this Alley Hollow here. That is all it is. It is just a gravel and dirt road. Rough.

M. Wow! Okay. I want to get back and ask you a couple of more questions about the mill. What was the roof...how was the roof covered? Do you remember?

B. It was just a common shingle roof.

M. A common shingle roof?

B. Yes. Cedar shingles.

- M. How about the inside? Can you remember a little more about the inside?
- B. Well, they had all kinds of machinery when there was a mill in here, grinding flour in here. In fact, this equipment came from the Summersville mill up there.
- M. The Summersville mill?
- B. Yes. They replaced it with bigger....
- M. Do you ever remember there being a set of grist stones? or stone buhrs in here?
- B. No, sir. I don't....they always say that these stone buhrs in here, but, they ground it right over here on that. That is where they ground the....
- M. That is where they ground the corn?
- B. Yes, yes.
- M. That is where they ground the corn on that roller mill there?
- B. Yes, yes. I have heard them talk about that, but I sure never saw them in my time grind on those stone buhrs.
- M. Was there a counter of a scale where they could weigh their.....?
- B. Yes. They had these scales here. They had these big, kind of a platform scale here that sat right along in here.
- M. How about the....do you remember anything about the miller's office? We got a report saying there used to be a...where we've got corn stored back over here now...there used to be a miller's office.
- B. Yes.
- M. Do you remember how that was furnished?
- B. (Laughter)
- M. (Laughter) I know some of these questions are.....
- B. It didn't have much furniture in it. I'll tell you that right now. It just had kind of a little desk. They used to have a postoffice in there, too.
- M. They used to have a postoffice here in the mill?
- B. Yes. Right over in there. That was, I guess, one of the first postoffices

in Alley. It used to be over across the river over there, but, I guess one of the first postoffices they ever had was in that mill over there.

M. The mill, huh? Who was the postmaster? Do you remember?

B. Well, gee, I remember J. M. Knotts was postmaster here and then Jona Greggs was postmaster here. My dad had a postoffice up there in 1926.

M. Was this always called Alley Postoffice?

B. Yes.

M. In the miller's office, where you said there used to be a postoffice there, too, you said there was a little desk that he had. Do you remember what that desk looked like?

B. (Laughter) No, I don't remember. It was just one of those old-fashioned desks, similar to that thing over there, probably. All he had was a place to write on.

M. But, it wasn't like a rolltop desk?

B. No, no. It wasn't a rolltop desk.

M. Did it have any type of a heater? How was this place heated in the wintertime?

B. Well, if they were heated, I never knew it. (Laughter)

M. (Laughter)

B. I'll tell you, it was cold over here.

M. I'll bet it was. How much did the miller charge to grind up wheat and corn?

B. He would take out a percent of the finished product, of course, but I don't know what....it seemed to me it was a eighth.

M. One-eighth? That is pretty high.

B. Yes.

M. That is pretty high. Do you recall where the corn sheller used to be?

B. (Laughter) I'm not going to tell you. I really don't know where it was, but, they had a corn sheller in here. I don't remember where it was.

M. Okay. Did they used to drive the wagons up here to the door and unload?

- B. Yes.
- M. Was this a little bridge across this.....?
- B. Oh, yes. That there...that deep ditch wasn't there then.
- M. It wasn't there?
- B. No. You could just drive....it was easy to get up here. Why, they hauled them logs in here. It wasn't that deep ditch there.
- M. So, they didn't have this little creek coming through here at the time then?
- B. Oh, yes. That Alley Hollow....that outlet down there...
- M. That was part of Alley Hollow then?
- B. Yes.
- M. But, it was a dry wash.
- B. Yes. When they really had a rain, then is when it really got up big. That was the one that washed these stores and things away here. It wasn't a river because there isn't no current here from the river. This is all back-water up here.
- M. One of these photographs shows a little tram railroad going from the mill across the dam here.
- B. Yes.
- M. What did they use that for?
- B. To get dirt. That is the reason why I said it was all solid dirt when I was a kid growing up here.
- M. So, most of the time they were building the day.
- B. Well, that is the way they kept it up and kept....if it washed out or anything, why they would put that back in here. I can tell you that us kids used to go up there and fill that thing up. It is on the east side over there. You can go over there and see where they dug that dirt out. We would go up there and fill it up just to get to ride it back. (Laughter)
- M. (Laughter) Did you actually have tracks?

- B. Yes. Little railroad tracks.
- M. Little railroad tracks and, you had what looked like a coal mining car or something?
- B. Something like that, yes.
- M. Was that wooden or metal?
- B. Yes. It was a wooden with metal wheels. It is just about like the track that you had in these zinc and lead mines up there around Webb City and Joplin.
- M. You said that the dam was earthen?
- B. Yes. The top of it was.
- M. When did they put in the concrete retaining wall?
- B. The concrete forebay there?
- M. Yes.
- B. 1911.
- M. 1911. Do you recall any piers or any other gates at all there?
- B. I never seen anything. We never put anything in over that there gate that is out there. That is all we put on it when we built it. And, like I say, Johnny Bullocks had the contract to build it from old man J. M. Knotts. I guess I am the only one living amongst the ones that helped build this. There was Lee Lynch and George McIntosh, my brother Ben, myself, and Johnny Bullocks. The five of us.
- M. How about the bridge that went across the dam? How was that constructed?
- B. Bridge?
- M. Yes. You know where we walked around back here. You said that bridge was about there in the same spot as it was....
- B. Well, that there platform?
- M. Yes.
- B. We had that across there just to turn the concrete on.

- M. Oh, well, we understand each other. (Laughter)
- B. (Laughter)
- M. Okay. Straight up and down. How thick were the boards?
- B. Well, they was about, probably, two and one-half, three inches thick. The rough side was on the outside and the flat side fit where they nailed it together.
- M. How was the frame constructed? If the boards ran straight up and down, how were they....?
- B. Well, they run crosswise. I think there were three of them. One at the top, one in the middle, and one at the bottom.
- M. Okay, so, they connected to that?
- B. Yes.
- M. And, you wound the whole thing up with a windlass you say?
- B. A windlass, yes. Cedar windlass. It was all cedar.
- M. What did you have? A metal bar or something that came out of the top of the gate that hooked onto a chain or something?
- B. They just had a hook on it, a big hook in it. They hooked that...it was a cable.
- M. It was a cable?
- B. Yes, a cable.
- M. I was thinking maybe it was a chain, but that would begin to cut into the cedar and take chunks out of it. How could one person lift that gate up?
- B. Oh, it wasn't too bad to lift up with that windlass.
- M. With the windlass?
- B. Yes.
- M. How about when they had to clean the turbine here? Get down in there? What did they do? Just open up the gate or something? How would they, you know, somebody stand up there and get down there and clean?
- B. Well, they would get in there and punch that stuff out most of the time.

They would raise the gate and let the water and then they would get in there and punch it out. Of course, it collected quite a bit of these crests. There wasn't near the amount of them in there then as there is now. Somebody says that it is detergent. I don't know what it is that causes so much of this stuff in here. When I was a kid we used to go down where that little bridge comes across down there, where that big rock is down there. We used to get up gunny sacks full of suckers out there. See, all of this waste went down in that there and they would come up from the river to feed. There were hundreds of them in here...big ones.

M. What other kind of fish did you have in the stream?

B. Well, it had bass and, the suckers was mostly the fish and, of course, there is always perch and goggleye.

M. Are suckers pretty good eating?

B. If they are cooked right, they are the best.

M. (Laughter) I heard some other people say the same thing.

B. Yes, sir. You take them suckers and score them right close with a good sharp knife, probably an 1/8" apart, and then put them in deep grease and fry them, you can't beat them. You let them fry until they come to the top.

M. It sounds good.

B. They are good.

B. Did you ever hear of this sucker day that they have up here at Nixa?

M. No, I haven't.

B. They shut everything down and they have....I forget how many. It's just something. I am going to that some of these days if I live long enough.

(Laughter)

M. (Laughter) Okay, one other question I have. I was thinking about the gate. Okay. You say the gate was made of cedar, about three inches thick.

B. Yes, split cedar.

- M. Split cedar. Do you recall the size of the gate. Like how many feet long it was and how many feet wide?
- B. No. Of course, it had to fit that opening out there so that it would hold the water.
- M. Was there any metal around the gate to keep it from splitting the wood or rubbing.....?
- B. No, no. I don't think there was any metal on it. They just put it on there and nailed on some good, three big heavy boards and, like I say, they were cedar. The whole outfit was cedar.
- M. Did you...I don't know if I asked you or not how wide those boards were?
- B. I would say probably about three inches. It might have been four.
- M. Four inches wide and about three inches thick.
- B. Like I say, they was a split cedar. They hadn't been sawed out or anything. They were just split.
- M. It is interesting. Almost like the gate we have on there now. Very much like that.
- B. Where is the gate at?
- M. I think it is still out there in the front.
- B. Well, that is the gate. (Laughter) That is it.
- M. That is the same one?
- B. Yes, sir. That is the same one that we put in there.
- M. At any of the times that you have been here, have you ever seen two gates?
- B. No, sir, like I said, my father came down here in 1884.
- M. So, the state never had another gate put in themselves?
- B. No. That is the same one that was put in there when we built that thing in 1911. It has been there a long time.
- M. It sure has. It sure has. So, as far as you can remember, there has only been one gate there.

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