Bennett Spring State Park is 100 years old Page 2

by Laura L. Valenti



October 2024

Bennett Spring State Park is 100 years old

LAURA L. VALENTI

Bennett Spring State Park is observing its 100th anniversary this month. The following is a history of the area where the park is now located.

The first visitors to what we now call Bennett Spring were barefoot and later moccasin-footed. Members of the Osage, the Delaware and Kickapoo tribes were known to have hunted, fished and camped in the area. Some historians believe the People of the Middle Waters, as the Osage called themselves, did not actually live at the spring, but rather simply passed through, believing this to be a sacred area.

They shared a legend that described the original site of the spring as a small pool of great depth. Despite its calm waters which produced only a small stream of water, their stories related that those native people forgot their traditions, who they were and where they came from. They became proud and arrogant. One night, after they had returned from yet another shameful raid, the Sacred One's wrath was felt as the ground shook, trees tumbled and the earth changed forever. The quiet pool became a boiling spring, as ceaseless tears began to flow from the eye of the Sacred One, creating a flowing stream that followed along the valley floor to the Niangua River. Bennett Spring, the spring we know that produces 100 million gallons of cool fresh water daily, was born.

By the early 1800s, the Osage, the primary Indian tribe of this area, left of their own accord as their chief, Pawhuska, moved his people to lands in Kansas.

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Submitted photo

NG

One hundred and one year old Bennett Spring trout hatchery building, belonging to the Missouri Department of Conservation is under major renovation in 2024. Seen here shortly after it was built, it sits on a much shallower spring branch at the time, one that existed still in its natural state, years before major dam construction, dredging and other changes to accommodate thousands of trout fisherman, changed the depth and shape of the spring stream.

BOAT TOWN

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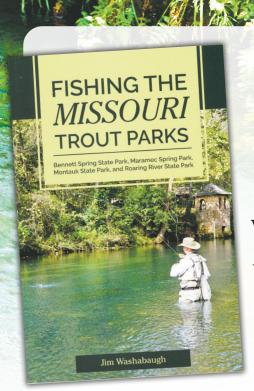
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PARK

By the 1830s, the U.S. Army made certain that all other Indians had been pushed westward, leaving behind only thousands of arrowheads, souvenirs that today decorate the mantels of many local residences and on rare occasion, still delight a sharp-eyed tourist.

In 1837 James Brice, originally from Virginia, and his wife, Ann, arrived in the valley from Illinois. The forest of oak, hickory, black walnut, elm, maple and dogwood grew dense with underbrush and bears, wolves, panthers, wildcats and even the occasional buffalo were also common. Smaller animals such as raccoons, rabbits, squirrels, deer, fox, beaver, mink, muskrat and wild turkey, most of which can still be seen on occasion, abounded.

In the early 1840s James Brice, then 50 years old, built the first of several mills in the Bennett Spring area. As other settlers moved into the valley the area became known as Brice Spring. The small village that sprang up on the site of today's Bennett Spring State Park Store was later called Brice, Missouri.

Within a few years other settlers and families moved into the valley, including a family named Bennett. Peter M. Bennett constructed a second mill at the confluence, where the spring waters meet the Niangua River, but within a few short years, both mills were destroyed by flood waters.

James Brice's daughters, Jane and Anna, grew up and married others in the valley; Jane to Asahel Bennett and Anna, per her father's wishes, married John Clanton, a young wagon maker from North Carolina. He and Anna had two children, Nancy Jane and James Madison Clanton, before John Clanton's death in the winter of 1856 at the age of 30. Shortly afterwards in early 1857, Anna Brice Clanton gave birth to her third child, Anna Caroline.

By the 1860s the country as a whole was engaged in the Civil War but the spring area and the tiny town of Brice were protected by their secluded location and lack of a nearby railhead.

The widow Anna Brice Clanton remarried, to Peter M. Bennett Jr. this time. The 427 acres of property, including the spring itself that had once belonged to her father and had been willed by him to her first husband, John Clanton, now reverted fully to her. Upon her marriage to Peter Bennett Jr., all of her property became his and soon the general area became known as Bennett Spring. Peter and Anna Bennett had six children but only two lived to adulthood, William Sherman and Josephine Bennett.

In 1894 the Rev. George Bolds, his wife, Mary, and their four children, the oldest being a 17-year old daughter, Louie Bolds, came to Bennett Spring and held the first of many old time revivals. At their first meeting, 38 men and women were saved and baptized including 29 year old William Sherman Bennett. A year later, he and Louie Bolds were married. In the years to come, Louie and later her son, Paul, would become wellknown ministers throughout the area.

The record is vague as to exactly how many mills were eventually built in the valley. The two original grain mills were both known to have been destroyed by flood and the last mill built by Peter Bennett was constructed close to the village of Brice. It burned in 1895. The last Bennett Spring mill, a grist mill, was built by a partnership of Lebanon residents. It stood near the location of the previous mill, across the section of land that today holds the concrete hatchery pools built in the 1960s.

This last mill opened in 1900, once again drew people to Bennett Spring to fish and camp while they waited in line for their wheat to be ground. Meanwhile, a report in the Laclede County Sentinel in January 1900 stated that the Missouri Fish Commissioner deposited 40,000 mountain trout into the spring branch, brought from west of the Continental Divide. While several others, visitors and residents alike, expressed an interest in stocking more trout in the area, an Oklahoma dentist, Charles A. Furrow, and an unnamed business partner were the first to actually invest in the idea by establishing a hatchery at Bennett Spring in July 1923.

Others began to come to Bennett Spring driving Model A's and Model T's or a rented buggy from Lebanon to picnic, visit or even spend a night or two at the Brice Inn, run by Josephine "Josie" Bennett.

According to an article that appeared in the December 12, 1924 issue of the Laclede County Republican, A.O. Mayfield, the president of the Lebanon Chamber of Commerce, requested that state officials consider Laclede County as a possible site for the first state park.

Soon after negotiations began however, they were publicly called off as the parties involved could not agree. They began again shortly afterwards and on December 27, 1924, Josie Bennett Smith sold the state their first acquisition



Submitted photo

Horseracing was one of the favorite past times of the residents of the village of Brice in addition to fishing in both the spring branch and the Niangua River.

of land, 8.5 acres for the new Bennett Spring State Park.

In April 1925, William Sherman Bennett sold 565 acres of land to the state that would become the heart of Bennett Spring State Park and 427 of those acres could be traced directly to his grandfather, James Brice, the original settler at Bennett Spring.

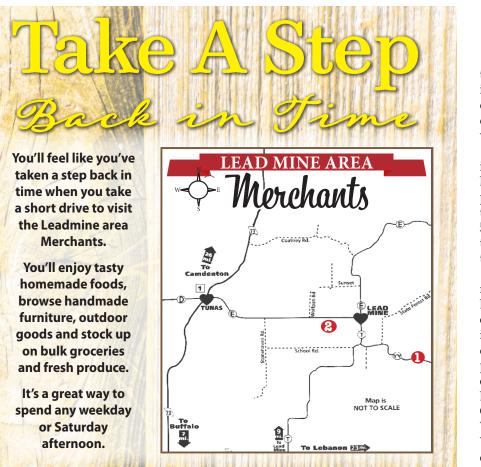
Arlie Bramwell, a great-great-grandson of James Brice, was hired as the first superintendent of both the park and the hatchery. Life in Brice, Missouri continued basically uninterrupted for a few more years, despite the change of ownership of the land.

The Great Depression changed many things in America and by 1933, one in four persons throughout the U.S. had lost their job, their home or both. The Civilian Conservation Corps, one of several Federal programs designed to put

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PARK

the country back on sound economic footing, provided hundreds with desperately needed jobs with many different projects. Bennett Spring Park was one of them.

The CCC work at Bennett Spring is well-documented and includes the Dining Lodge and the stone on the triple-arched bridge. In 1938, the year after the CCC left the area, records indicate 53,762 persons visited Bennett Spring, ten percent of the total visitors that year to Missouri's twenty-five state parks.

For the next two to three decades, most of the development around Bennett Spring took place outside of the park's boundaries as private individuals, built cabins, hotels and campgrounds. For the next many years, people planning a summer weekend or vacation to Bennett often did so at Bramwell's Cabins, Usery's Cabins and Campground, the Sand Spring Resort, Weaver's Campground, Splan's Resort, Vogels—the list of private campground owners was long. Beginning in 1969, the state began to buy up many of those private enterprises, one by one. Arlie Bramwell sold his wood and stone cabins that once graced the hillside across from what is now known as the Bramwell entrance to the park, to the state. Ralph and Willa Jean's cabins and small stable, located near the spring, were also purchased and used by the state for a time, before they were razed and replaced by new structures in the 1980s.

Improved Federal and state highway systems in the 1950s and 1960s brought a growing number of visitors to Bennett Spring each year until the yearly average during the 1970s was a million fishermen, their families and other tourists.

Bennett Spring State Park, since the first lands were purchased from members of the Bennett family in the mid-1920s, has been a jewel of the Missouri State Park system and continues in that role 100 years later.

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from page 3

Gravel Bar at Sand Spring recovering from fire

JACK SILBERBERG

REPORTER@LACLEDERECORD.COM

A July fire has not stopped Sand Spring Resort from operating the Gravel Bar and finding alternate ways to provide food to its customers. Reconstructed the bar's restaurant is not, but the drive to serve the community that supports the resort remains, according to co-owner Jack Glendenning.

"We appreciate all the support from everybody," Glendenning said.

A late July fire rendered the restaurant portion of the Gravel Bar and Grill a structural loss, with Glendenning stating the cause as having to do with the electrical work in the most recent addition to the building. The company's ongoing conversation with its insurance company means that reconstruction is a long way off.

In the meantime, though, the bar portion has reopened. Glendenning further noted that some of the restaurant's employees decided to continue working in another capacity with Sand Spring. While twenty food trucks reached out after Glendenning put out a request on Facebook, Bubba's Fish Shack has become the mainstay until at least Labor Day. Glendenning was pleased with the resort and truck owners' working relationship.

"They've done a really nice job, and they're local," Glendenning said. "It's been a pretty good deal for us both."

The resort's main office will function as the new home of Hunt Brothers pizza and wings as of Friday, Glendenning hoped. He noted that the space was previously used for the same purpose and was recertified after the fire.

As the road towards reconstruction of the Gravel Bar and Grill stretches ahead, Glendenning remained grateful for the community's continued support in this trying time.

"It's a big family out here," said Glendenning. "Even our regular guests. They're concerned about what's going on."



LCR Photo/Jack Silberberg

Bubba's Fish Shack sits in the resort courtyard. After a late July fire rendered the restaurant section of the Gravel Bar and Grill inoperable, the resort has found alternate ways to provide food to its guests.



The bar portion of the Gravel Bar and Grill at Sand Spring Resort has reopened. Co-owner Jack Glendenning noted that while demolition work on the ruined restaurant has been done, the conversation with insurance is ongoing.





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We want to thank you for visiting our beautiful Bennett Spring State Park. While you are in the Bennett Spring area, we invite you to visit Historic Downtown Lebanon. Take the short, scenic 11-mile drive into the city of Lebanon. Stay straight on Jefferson until you reach Commercial. Whether you decide to turn right or left on Commercial Street, you will find lots of interesting things to do like visiting Downtown businesses or attending one of our many events.

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We hope you will make plans to visit Downtown soon or perhaps return to our area to enjoy one of our upcoming events.



UPCOMING EVENTS



October 4th • 5PM - 8PM

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Our shops will have extended hours, deals, activities, artists, artisans, and more. Come enjoy our cozy restaurants, grab a drink or two, and soak up the vibrant atmosphere.

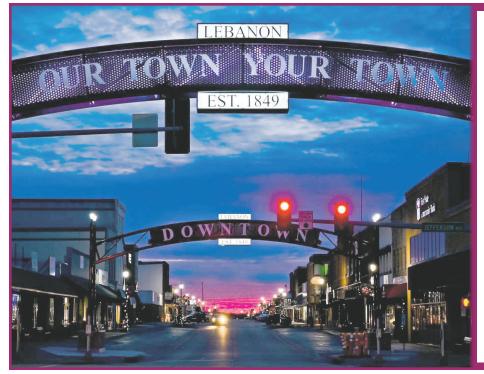
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Join us as we kick off the start of the holiday season as the Mayor lights the tree at The Market.

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Kay Peace: A lifetime at Bennett Spring

LAURA L. VALENTI

Kay Peace has spent a lifetime at Bennett Spring. Growing up on a farm outside of Buffalo, Mo., and graduating high school there, she spent summers with her sister, Willa Jean Usery and her husband, Ralph who were well-known resort owners at Bennett Spring. They owned cabins at the head of the spring branch. The state now has cabins on that same site which were built in the 1980s. The Userys also had a string of horses and a small barn adjacent to their resort. One of Kay's most enjoyable duties was guiding park visitors on trail rides through the park. She also guided trail rides along the far side of the spring on what became known as the Equestrian Trail. For years after the horses were gone, it was also a popular hiking trail. (Sadly, due to erosion by the Spring Branch waters and therefore, safety concerns that trail is now closed.)

Meanwhile, Larry Peace's parents,

Frank and Pauline had moved to the park from Jefferson City with their family, to become the Bennett Spring Park concessionaires from 1947 to 1957. Kay remembered, with a smile, Larry telling her how in years past, he collected camping fees, walking from campsite to campsite for his parents.

Larry and Kay were married in 1959 and Kay worked at the Dining Lodge for a time immediately afterwards. They then became the concessionaires for the Montauk State Park near Salem, Mo. and continued in that role until 1966. In the winter of 1965, they built their popular store on the edge of Bennett Spring State Park and opened it the following year. Friends of Ralph and Willa Jean's had built the cabins that are next door to the store and in 1973, Kay and Larry purchased those. For many years, their store and resort were simply known by all, as Larry's.

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Kay Peace has spent a lifetime at Bennett Spring. She operated a resort for many years with her late husband, Larry Peace.



Construction continues at Bennett Spring State Park

LCR STAFF

Construction is continuing this year on a multi-year, \$40 million renovation of the Missouri Department of Conservation hatchery at Bennett Spring State Park.

This project includes a new intake structure, reconstruction of the raceways, a new office, water quality improvements, and other upgrades and refurbishments that will improve fish production and site resiliency. Cahills Construction of Rolla is the contractor on this project.

Even with construction, anglers are still reeling in trout at the park. MDC staff continue to stock the stream several times each week for excellent fishing even while construction is in

full swing. A big reason fishing and construction have been co-existing at Bennett Spring this summer is because of the connectivity of MDC's cold-water hatchery system. Bennett Spring Hatchery normally produces up to 450,000 trout annually from egg to fingerling size and stocks 325,000 in the park's waters each year. The reason there are still trout to catch at Bennett Spring - despite the reduction in fish production at the hatchery with construction - is that MDC's other cold-water hatcheries in the state have picked up the slack. The bulk of the trout for this summer's fishing has come from MDC's Montauk Hatchery (Dent County), from MDC's Shepherd of the Hills Hatchery (Taney County), and from privately-owned hatcheries.

The project is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2025.

According to Hatchery Manager Ben Havens in an Aug. 30 Facebook Live from the Missouri Department of Conservation, the project has been progressing throughout the summer and has not impeded fishing.

"We're still stocking a lot of great cold water fish," said Havens.

Havens further noted that areas under construction are not allowing fishers and will be clearly demarcated.

"We ask everyone to remain patient with us as we work through this renovation process," said Havens.



LCR Photo/Jack Silberberg **Construction** can be seen as work continues on renovated facilities for Bennett Spring State Park.

PEACE

"Larry and I both fished some before we had the business—he ran the store and I had the cabins but after that, we were too busy. I really enjoyed the work, meeting all the people that we did. As a result, we met folks we would never have met otherwise, and many of them became dear friends, coming back year after year."

Kay and Larry raised their sons, Mike and Kelly at the park and for many years, Kelly worked with Larry at the store and then later, operated the store on his own. Mike and his wife, Roma had moved into the computer software business, a venture that eventually took them to Australia for many years. Both of Kelly's kids, two of Kay's grandkids, Kyler and Carrington, worked at the store briefly and from there started their own shaved ice business, SnoBiz, which consists of many regional kiosks, including one still in the store parking lot at Larry's.

When Larry passed away five years ago, both of Kay's sons and her grandchildren, as well as so many of her customers, remained so supportive she was able to continue to operate the business for a couple more years. In 2023, Kay sold the business, both the store and the resort, to three area businessmen, Logan Miller, Isaac Stewart and Chip McGeehan and they have continued the operation without changing the name.

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Mike and Roma have moved to Springfield while Mike returns to Australia with business concerns and Kelly is now working for Buc-cee's, the huge convenience store on Highway 44, just east of Springfield.

Kay concluded. "The house next door to ours at Bennett, became available and I let a couple who had been our good customers and friends, George and Mary O'Brien, know about it. They purchased it and George was looking forward to us being neighbors but unfortunately that didn't happen."

Due to health concerns, Kay moved to Cedarhurst Assistant Living community recently.

Looking back, Kay concluded with a contented smile, "I loved my customers, some of whom have continued to contact me here. I enjoyed my years at both Montauk and Bennett Spring. I don't think I would change a thing."





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BENNETT SPRING STATE PARK AND SURROUNDING AREA

| A B C D E F G | |
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| MISSOURI (23) | |
| | |
| 1 Bennett Spring Campground D6 | |
| KANSAS CITY CITY | 1 |
| 3 Bennett Spring Grill D7 | |
| 4 Bennett Spring Restaurant C7 | |
| BENNETT Spring 5 Bennett Spring Homestead Motel D7 6 Bennett Spring Inn E7 | - |
| 7 Bennett Spring State Park Store C7 | |
| BARCO BARCO G8 | |
| 9 Castaway Campground E7 | 2 |
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| 11 Corkery Campground C1 12 Family Crossing/The Bennett Boom F7 | |
| BOLHOUSE 12 Family Crossing/The Bennett Room E7 13 Ft. Niangua River Resort B6 | _ |
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| 15 Hidden Valley Outfitter C5 | |
| 16 Ho-Humm Canoe Rental & Campground C1 | 3 |
| KANSAS CITY 17 Hootie Hoot Hollow D7 184 MILES D7 | |
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| 19 Larry's Cedar Resort D7 20 Litty Custom Knives B5 | |
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| 21 MacCreed's Art Gallery E7 22 Majestic Views Floats of Missouri A4 | |
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| 22 24 Menagerie Campground A5 | |
| 64 25 NRO Canoe Rental & Campground B1 | |
| 26 One-Eyed Willy's & Pete's Place C1 27 Peaceful Valley RV Park D8 | |
| 24 28 Reading's Fly Shop E7 | |
| 30 29 Riverfront Campground C6 | |
| 30 Riverwood Resort D5 | |
| (35) 31 Sand Spring Resort/The Gravel Bar & Grill C6 | 5 |
| 32 Thompson's RV Park F7 33 Bennett Spring Propane F8 | |
| 24 Waawar's Tackle Store D7 | |
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LUNKER CATCHES



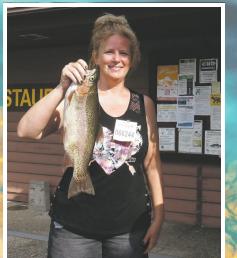
John Hengermann, Troy, Zone 3, Yellow worm, 3 1/4 pounds



Gary Kline, Wichita, KS, almost had a lunker with us!! Great job on your nice 2 1/2 pounder caught in zone 2 with a nymph!



Ky Nichols Frankford , 7 1/4 pounds, Zone 3, powerbait



Debra Huffner, Bates City, 4 pounds, White mini jig, Zone

LITTLE LUNKER CATCHES



Alex H. Age 6, 1st trout! Congratulations!



Hazel, age 5, with her catch of 3! Nice job!!

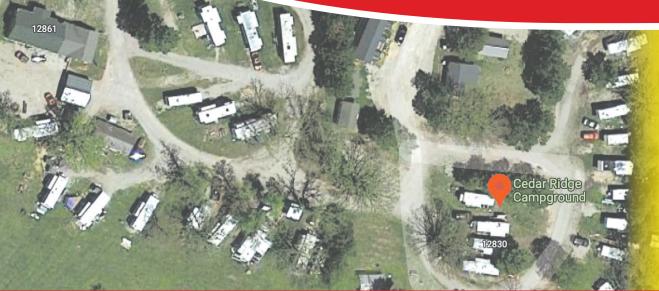


Tre, age 6, Zone 3 powerbait.



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