

# The Big Spring

by Terry Primas

Ninety-eight degrees in the shade and where to have a picnic? The Big Spring in Waynesville was a favorite public place on a sweltering day for local town dwellers. Folks from neighboring villages came to enjoy a stream-side lunch, too.

The Big Spring (also known as Waynesville and Roubidoux Spring) boils out of an underwater cave with a water temperature of 58 degrees. The cool temperature moderates the heat around the spring, just as the cool air wafting from Maxey Cave made it a favorite picnic spot in the country southwest of town (see News, page 17.)

The average daily flow of the spring is 37 million gallons and the highest flow measured was 124 million gallons per day in 1970. It ranks sixteenth among Missouri springs.

The spring lies at the south end of Roy Laughlin Park on City of Waynesville property. It hasn't always been so. In the early part of the 20th century, the spring belonged to Frank O. Gray. In October, 1909, J. W. Wheeler, Administrator of the estate of Frank O. Gray, deceased, posted a notice in the *Democrat* that all of Gray's belongings, including a parcel of land containing the Big Spring, would be auctioned off on the south steps of the Pulaski County Courthouse.

The *Democrat* reported on the impending sale, noting with some vision that "This is a remarkable piece of property and the citizens realizing the fact that it should belong to the town, have raised a fund to buy the tract of land on which it is situated. It may prove to be of great value to the city."

The auction at the courthouse took

place on Tuesday, November 10, 1909. The *Democrat* reported in its November 12th issue, "The tract of land on which the Big Spring is situated was sold to the highest bidder in the court yard Tuesday and the same was knocked off to a representative of the citizens of Waynesville for two hundred dollars. A fund of about \$500 had been subscribed and at a meeting Wednesday evening of the shareholders decided to advertise for bids on the erection of a concrete wall around the spring six feet above the water level as an experiment in an effort to raise the water. Should the experiment prove successful the development will be continued. The business will be transacted under the cognomen of the Waynesville Development Company and the formal notice for bids appears elsewhere in this issue."

The 100-foot long concrete wall was built, eventually higher than six feet. A road passes between the bluff and the spring and is protected by the retaining wall.

The Big Spring has been the subject of many postcards and, undoubtedly, many snapshots. The spring itself did not reproduce particularly well in the old photos but, nonetheless, we offer a representative selection on this and the next page.

Next year, 2009, will mark the 100th anniversary of the City of Waynesville's ownership of the Big Spring. It has offered its water to Cherokee Indians on the Trail of Tears in 1839. Union soldiers quartered at Post Waynesville on the bluff above the spring watered their horses in its branch. Today anglers chase its trout and divers plunge into the darkness of the cave from which it gushes.



A very early picture of the Big Spring with citizens in their Sunday finery stairstepped up the bluff. Courtesy of Pulaski County Historical Society.

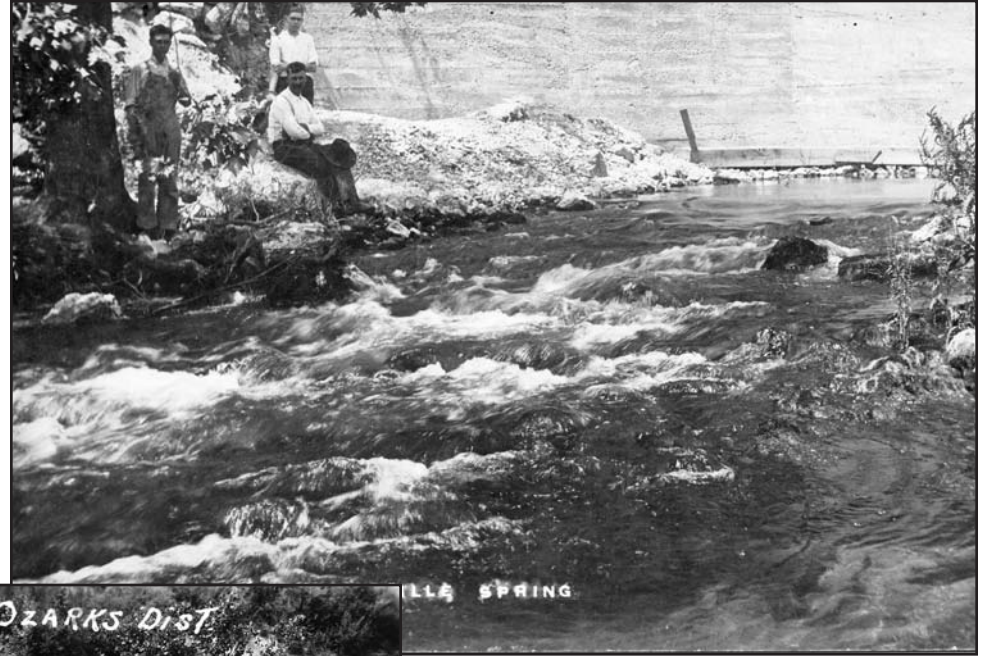


This looks like a group visiting the spring after church, ladies with big hats and men in collars and ties. The group includes six women and four men. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.



Although dressed up, these six young men look a little more relaxed and adopt a more casual pose. The long exposure time blurred the rushing water from the rise pool. Courtesy of Bob and Geneva Goodrich - George Lane Collection.





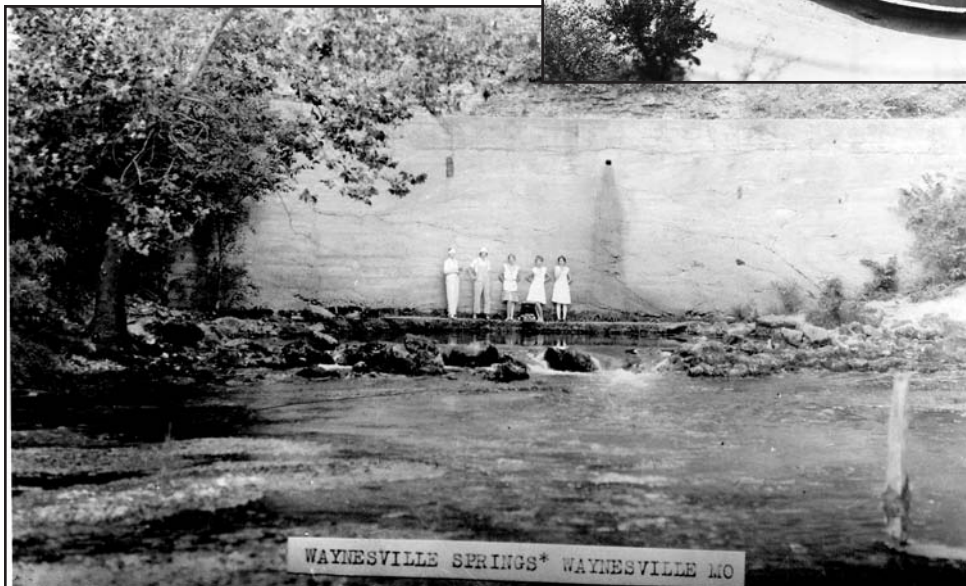
In the 1909 postcard above, the county road that leads to the spring is visible in the upper right section. A man is relaxing by the spring below the road.

Pictures on this page courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas

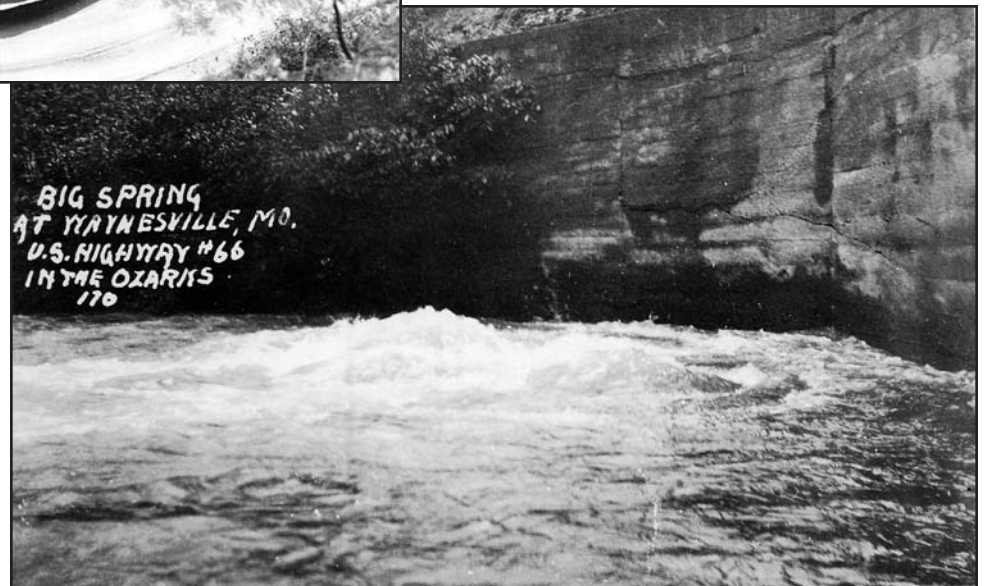


The gentlemen above look as if they are taking some time off from work to enjoy the temperate air around the spring.

The view at left, taken from the top of the bluff, shows the road above the retaining wall and the spring rise pool. The rock dam at the bottom of the pool serves to raise the level about two feet to protect it from the creek.



The retaining wall, poured sometime in the 1920s, provides a backdrop for what looks like flappers of that period.



During periods of high discharge, the flow coming from the underwater opening can boil three feet above the surface of the pool.

St. Robert Glass

Rachelle Beasley

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