PURE AIR,
MISSOURI

According to the story, on a hot, sultry day in the late 1800’s, “Granny” Johnson, who managed the General Store, had been down in the gullies to get her cows. As she walked up from the pastures below, she could be heard saying that it sure was good to be back in pure air again! This supposedly is how Pure Air, Missouri, received its name.

The Pure Air community is located approximately 18 miles southwest of Kirkville. The town came into existence in the late 1800’s on land donated by Francis Miller. Pure Air had two roads, the main road running from east to west, the other diagonally southwest. When Pure Air was a flourishing community it consisted of a church, a general store, a drug store, a blacksmith and a sawmill. Early citizens remember that Samuel Vice’s General Store was situated in the area where these two streets intersected.

Prior to 1905, the Union Church was located east of the General Store. A more adequate facility was needed and in 1906 a new church was built across the road, where it stands today. Construction costs were greater than the townspeople anticipated. The Methodist Church agreed to pay the one hundred dollars to complete the building, if the church building was deeded to them. As a result, it was operated as a Methodist Church until the early 1940’s.

Another building remembered by the residents was the pool hall. It was housed in a log cabin owned originally by Johnny Bozarth and was located across from the Union Church. Mr. Dan Swisher bought the pool hall in 1900 and moved the equipment across the road just west of the General Store. The log cabin was then used for an ice house for a few years. It was torn down before the building of the Methodist Church in 1906.

Charlie Dixon operated a drug store which was located between the General Store and the pool hall. It went out of business in the early 1900’s. A short distance southeast of the main row of stores was a harness shop. Fritz Vice was the owner and area farmers depended on him for new harness and gear; he also did repair work. Mr. Bill Ziegler later purchased the harness shop and operated it for several years.

Bob Severe owned and operated a sawmill just west of the business area. As the only sawmill operator, Mr. Severe did a thriving business in the community.

Near the sawmill, Mr. Jesse Kriner owned a dry goods store, supplying the families with clothes and shoes. The dry goods store went out of business before 1920. Mr. Kriner also owned the blacksmith shop, which Grover Yowell later owned until there no longer was a need for a blacksmith.

“Billy” Williams and his son-in-law, Bill Daniels, operated a small general store a short distance north of the sawmill. Mr. Daniels bought Mr. Williams’ share and continued to run it for about two years before going out of business.

Just after the turn of the century, medicine shows were common in the Pure Air area. The members of the company presented magic acts, plays, and animal acts. One of the medicine shows brought back humorous memories for Mr. Glen Jones. “I remember one time when I was a young boy, my family went to one of these medicine shows. There was a big tent set up, and this fellow had some children ride his mules, and then offered any adult ten dollars if they could ride one. Several people attempted, but none succeeded.” How were the citizens of Pure Air to know that the mules were trained?

Doctor W. E. “Ed” Munn was the only doctor in the Pure Air area.
Air area in the early 1900's. He and his family lived a short
distance east of the Union Church. In 1910 Doctor Munn and
his family built his home, that included his medical office, just
south of the business area. From this office he served the area
for 45 years.

In the early 1920's, square dances with the music provided
by local talent were held on an outdoor platform east of the
Methodist Church. Mr. Ray Sanford, guitarist, and Mr. Buddy
Bozarth, fiddler, were among the many musicians who could
be heard on Saturday night. Many young people had their
first square dancing lessons on this platform. The older per-
sons enjoyed listening to the music, watching the dancers,
and visiting. Others danced until the fiddler played "Home
Sweet Home." These dances continued off and on until the
mid-1930's.

One of the holidays celebrated in the Pure Air community

Below: Laura Daniels saws down an abandoned telephone
pole to help clear the land for the church while Max Dimit and
Vernie Jones brace the pole. The feed house can be seen in
the background.

was the Fourth of July. "Billy" Daniels remembers the Fourth
as being celebrated with an all-day picnic south of the
business area. One of the highlights of the day was the
shooting off of a pile of gun powder. It was placed on the
blacksmith's anvil. A strong arm wielded the hammer and the
resulting explosion could be heard for many miles. For the
children, there was a merry-go-round, which cost five cents a
ride. The merry-go-round was pulled by hand, but sometimes
a mule was available to supply the power needed. Merchants
would set up booths to sell refreshments of lemonade,
peanuts, popcorn, and ice cream. Mr. Jesse Yowell, one of the
first participants, also made sure that fireworks were there to
be enjoyed by the entire community. The evening of the
Fourth was topped off with a dance, the platform being left to
be reused for dances held later during the summer months.

In 1907, Jesse and Eva Yowell and James and Nellie Yowell
bought the General Store. A few years later, Jesse Yowell
bought his brother's share. Jesse and Eva Yowell con-

Below: Mr. Grover Jones shown in front of his service station
in the early 1950's.

The community chipped in to help
clear land for the church in 1952.
Pictured (l to r): Loretta Ellsworth,
Laura Daniels, Evaalea Shafer, Jim
Daniels, Reverend John Fox, Ross
Athon, and Leslie Ellsworth.
continued to operate the General Store for many years. In 1927 they sold a section of land just east of the General Store, where the harness shop had stood, to the Farmers' Exchange of Novinger. The Exchange erected a tile building to operate a branch office for the area. They served the area for about eight to ten years.

The Farmers' Exchange discontinued the service of the branch office because people no longer needed their services. Milk routes were established to transport their livestock and poultry to market. Later, the buildings and land were sold back to Mrs. Eva Yowell. Jesse, her husband, died of typhoid fever in 1933.

As cars became more common in Pure Air, a service station was needed. Mr. Grover Jones and his cousin, Clyde Jones, opened a garage west of Pure Air. A few years later, Grover Jones opened his own garage just east of the Methodist Church, operating it from 1934-1936. In 1936, he bought the area of land just east of the first station and moved his family and garage to the new location. Mr. Jones then added gas pumps and continued to operate it until 1950 when he accepted a job as chief mechanic with the Novinger School District to service the buses.

From 1940 to 1941, John H. and Geneva McVay ran the General Store owned by Mrs. Jesse Yowell. From 1941 to 1944, Mrs. Yowell, with the help of Oscar Thomas, operated the store. Due to poor health, Mrs. Yowell closed the store from 1944 to 1947 and moved to Kirksville where she lived until her death in 1949. Mr. and Mrs. Carl Howell leased the store and buildings from her in March of 1947, moving the business from the original building to the former Farmers' Exchange building. The original shelving and counters were used in the new building.

In the summer of 1947, Carl Howell erected a frame for an outdoor movie screen. Wooden benches were provided for the audience. Refreshments could be purchased at the General Store. The movie projector and films were brought to Pure Air by Mr. Odis Williams from Kirksville on Thursday nights. Some of the movies shown were Ma and Pa Kettle Back on the Farm and Tarzan. The show started with a cartoon and several minutes of a continuing serial, usually just segments of a movie, before the feature film started. The movie was followed by previews of upcoming attractions. The price to see a movie was only ten cents for children and a quarter for adults. Thursday night movies were discontinued in 1954 because Mr. Williams quit coming to Pure Air due to low attendance. Television had taken the audience from the movies.

Mr. John H. McVay purchased the General Store and building in March, 1950, from the Yowell estate. He settled his wife, Geneva, and two children, Mary Kathryn and Johnny, into the house shortly after. Soon after taking over the store, they remodeled the inside of the main building. A new look was achieved when knotty pine

Top: Johnny McVay is working with the grain bin and helped with the making of his own feed "Dairy Feed." Middle: Mrs. Geneva McVay behind the counter of the General Store in 1954. Bottom: John 'Jack' McVay, who was owner of the General Store, is shown in the creamery, testing some cream.
Top: The outdoor movie seats where many have enjoyed a good show. Pictured (left to right) are: Mary Ruth McVay, Mary K. McVay, Johnny McVay, Wilma McVay, Bob McVay, Betty McVay, Geneva McVay and Francis McVay. In the background is the feed house; it stands on the foundation of the original General Store. The gasoline motor that ran the hammer mill is next to the building. Bottom: The Pure Air baseball team, back row (l to r): Carol Burchett, Harold Hill, Dee Daniels, Howard Snyder, Ivan Daniels, and Kermit Jones. Front row (l to r): Larry Jones, Donald Athon, Duane Jones, Asa Athon, and Johnny Shoop. Kneeling in front is 'Jack' McVay, coach.

Paneling was installed. A feed house and grinding mill were built on the foundation of the original row of stores.

Mr. McVay also had a trucking business. During the winter he usually hauled coal and in the spring he hauled cattle and corn to market. Mr. McVay purchased feed wholesale from Davis Cleaver of Kirkville to resell. He also mixed it with grain that he had ground in his mill. This he bagged himself to sell as his own brand, “Dairy Feed.” A cream testing room was set up in the corner of the store. Cream and eggs were purchased from the farmers, who in turn purchased groceries and feed from the McVays. Wool and poultry were also bought in season. About this time a gasoline pump was added for the convenience of their customers. When the pump was added, gasoline sold for 18 cents a gallon. Truly, the general store operator was a versatile person!

Above: The Jones family made up a large part of the Bible school in 1945. Back row (l to r): Bill Jones, Dorothy (Sanford) Hall, Orpha Jones, Margie (Jones) Sanford, Maxine (Jones) Golden. Front row (l to r): Gerald Jones, Guen (Jones) Athon, Jewell Jones, Kermit Jones, Tommy Jones, and Elaine Jones.

In the early 1950's, John H. McVay started and coached the Pure Air baseball team, more commonly referred to as the Hog Creek team. The baseball team, consisting of ten regular players, played many surrounding towns such as a Nind, Green Castle, the Ralph Banner team of Kirkville, and the Yarrow team. Baseball games were a popular social event of the community.

In 1958, Mr. Kermit Jones gave Mary Kathryn McVay a puppy, which was the runt of the litter. He became known as Yogi. Yogi grew up at the General Store. He acquired a taste for candy bars and Pepsi, which he drank out of the bottle, and he became a favorite of the customers for his unusual behavior.

Reverend Ralph M. G. Smith was interested in involving the rural areas in religious education. The church at Pure Air had stood empty for several years. In the summer of 1945 the first Baptist Church of Kirkville held a Vacation Bible School at the Methodist Church. Reverend Smith, with the help of some members of the Kirkville church, conducted a Bible study. From 1945 to 1954 the church operated as a Baptist mission. In 1952 the church was remodeled and a basement added. In 1954 the community bought the church and land and continued to operate as a Baptist Church with the Reverend John Fox as the first Baptist minister. In 1964 a new church was built adjoining the old. Reverend Clyde Enyeart was the minister at that time. The current pastor is Don Noble.

The Golden Rule school house was purchased by the Pure Air community in the late 1950’s and turned into a community building. Many gathered there on Friday nights and played cards. Pitch and pinochle were the most popular games.

Dances were another favorite pastime in Pure Air. Many enjoyed going to the indoor dances held at the school house. They danced to live music played by three or more persons.

The General Store was leased to James and Ivan Daniels in 1960. They kept the store open for six to eight months. It was then closed, never to be open for business again, because the dwindling population no longer made it a money-making proposition. The buildings and land were sold a few years later to the Pinkerton family. The General Store has been empty for 20 years.

Pure Air today, which consists only of the church, is just a peaceful farming community—a faded reminisce of the past.

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