CARDY in its Hay Days!

Seeing the sunlight filtering through the walls and dancing on the wooden floor of the town’s only general store, one recalls the times when people bought their bread unwrapped or traded their eggs and cream for flour and other staples. The town’s store served as the center of the community. People exchanged friendly greetings to each other even though they had just seen one another at church the day before. The town of Cardy, Missouri, today seems cold and dark, but in the 1800s it was very warm.

If you took a Sunday drive south on Highway 156, turned west on Highway 3, and traveled approximately two miles, you would be in Cardy. Only four buildings remain today: the house that was originally planned as the hospital, the post office, the general store, and the feed store. These buildings are owned by Bob Buck.

Olin Hall, once the owner of the general store from 1934-1950, said the founding fathers were George Hastings and Burt Foster and that Cardy was established as a railroad town. At one time Cardy was named Oliver and then changed to La Crosse, Missouri, but the name was changed again because it had conflicted with La Crosse, Wisconsin.

The depot was a busy place with trains arriving and departing throughout the day. The doodle bug, a small train, stopped in the morning leaving the parcel post and picking up any packages or farm products. Mr. Hall also had to hang the mail for pickup again in the afternoon; this was done twice a day, once around 6 o’clock in the morning and then again around 3 or 4 o’clock. When the Santa Fe diesel came, they would throw the mail pouches off and at the same time they reached out with a catcher and grabbed the mail bag off the hangers. Once in a while the train would run over the mail pouch cutting up the letters, creating a jigsaw puzzle for the mail carrier to assemble. The doodle bug returned around 10 p.m. Mr. Hall entertained this challenging schedule from 1934 until 1950.

In addition to this service, Cardy also had a post office. In the early 1900s one had to go to town to get his mail because there were only two rural routes out of the post office. In the 1940s the post office became a part of the general store.

A stock yard and a new depot were built when the Santa Fe double tracked. In 1864 the Santa Fe first bought the land right-of-way for the railroad, which much employment derived from the Santa Fe road bed. The section gang, men that worked on the railroad, build bridges over archways for creek channels which still stand today, and many are over a hundred years old.

One of the biggest industries of Cardy was the charcoal kilns which were in full production in the early 1900s. The kilns were large pits dug and lined with clay or brick, with a dome roof and a large steel door in front. These kilns took at one setting 100 cords of wood. Farmers with their horse and wagon would receive $3.50 a cord for wood delivered to the kiln. One loaded the kiln with hickory and oak, burned the fire until it reached a high temperature. The steel door would then be closed until the charcoal cooled. This was used in cooking on the Santa Fe dining cars. Charcoal was used instead of coal because coal was dirty and made the food taste funny. The charcoal was

July 4 was a very big occasion, children would return home from the big city for a celebration. Here the McCulloughs, Lenes, and Larnos families posed at McCullough home.
The general store was a friendly place where friends and neighbors would exchange greetings and news. In the early 1900s neighbors and friends gather to pose for this picture.

also loaded on the railroad cars to be sent all over the United States.

Another industry in Cardy was the grist mill run by George Mathes and John McCullough from 1925 to 1933. Farmers would bring their corn and wheat to be ground into meal and flour. They also had their grain ground for cattle and chicken feed. If one could not pay for the grinding, the millers took one-sixth of the grain for payment.

Sam McCullough was the blacksmith in Cardy. He sharpened plows, fixed wagon wheels, made various kinds of tools, and shod horses. Mr. McCullough was kept in business by his family which used old ways of farming until 1925. There were not many people in this area that had the machines to do the farmers’ work. The McCulloughs used horse-powered threshing machines and buzz saws. They traveled from Cardy to Worthington and often slept in barns. This was before the steam threshing machines in the early 1900s. They later changed to the steam engines.

There were three sorghum mills in the community. Jess Gunnells had one, as did J.J. Long and Theodore Nolte. They would make sorghum every fall from cane.

One of the stores in Cardy was the country store which was also called Cardy. It had a different atmosphere than today. The store smelled of spices that were in bulk and the freshly ground coffee. The apples, potatoes, and onions could be bought by 100 lb., bushel, or peck. You looked forward going to the store because you saw your neighbors and could exchange gossip and also the storekeeper was interested in you as a human being. He was concerned about your health, the weather, and your crops. “The children thought it was a hay day to go to the store with their parents to pay the bills because they might receive a bag of candy,” Dona McCullough said.

Olin Hall, Sam McCullough, and Paul St. Clair were some of the store’s owners. At one time the general store had two stories with the upstairs used as a meeting house. It burned in the early 1900s when Bill McCullough owned it. Willard Hall then rebuilt the store; J.J. Long restocked it. All the past owners allowed a small amount of credit to the men that worked on the section gang. The farmers used their eggs, milk, and cream as an exchange for goods; it was like having a dollar in their pockets. If you ever needed anything at any hour, you could find the owner and he would be glad to open the store for anyone.

Cardy had a doctor named Doctor Foster. When Dr. Foster was in his forties, his house burned so he decided to build a larger home and use it as a clinic. In this house there was an operating room, library, office, and medicine room plus three rooms upstairs that were made into patient’s rooms. Still today in these rooms are the beds and dressers for the patients.

In Mrs. Foster’s diary she wrote of having several patients
and charging small fees of one or two dollars. She also wrote of Dr. Foster’s health, the health of the community, and of losing close friends and her loved ones. The last two entries in her diary, December 14 and 15, 1936, mentioned her house had caught on fire and she thought how wonderful it was to have such lovely neighbors and friends. They all came and saved her house by forming a bucket line and putting out the fire.

Education was not known as it is today. In the Richland township, in Macon County, there was a school in each corner: Murry, Newburg, Union Ridge, and Shiford. Center was in the middle of the township. All the schools consisted of one room and a hall where the students hung their coats and stored wood during the winter. The teachers taught first through eighth grade in a small area. There were only 20 students in the school. The teachers conducted spelling bees, teacher-parent meetings, pie suppers, and baseball games between different schools.

After the eighth grade one would go to the La Plata or Elmer schools. But until 1939, the students had to walk all the way to Highway 156 to catch the La Plata school bus. In 1939 the county graveled the road to the Cardy store, and the students then walked to the store to catch the bus. Another major event in school was the wood-cutting party. The parents of the students who went to the different schools in the fall cut enough wood to last the winter and then stacked it. It was up to the children and the teacher to carry the wood in and to maintain the fire.

Most of the time the teachers would pick a student to carry in wood for a particular week.

Life in Cardy was not all work and no play. For entertainment the owner of the general store would have a free movie every Friday night. The only thing bad was that the movie was silent and outdoors. The owner of the store used the general store’s white walls to show the movie. If you did not want to see a movie, you could always go to a barn dance. Most of the barn dances were held at the Howard Morrison place. Sometimes they would have house dances. All the furniture in the living room would be moved into another room. Everyone brought the whole family and if you were not old enough to dance, then you were put on the bed with all the other children to sleep. Ada Mercer played the fiddle, Emma Long played the piano, and Ray Redman played the fiddle. The members in the band tried to have a dance every month and sometimes every week. During the summer holidays, like the Fourth of July, families would have a picnic, which was a very big occasion. Children would return home from the big city and everyone would bring a covered dish for the all-day affairs.

Maybe one can say the coolness of a community of today is better and that people have progressed so much more, but missing is the warmth of the less stressful life lived when Cardy was the hub of the community.

By Jean McCullough