On the Banks of Hazel Creek

Since the new city reservoir is going to cover parts of the Hazel Creek/Fegley area, some of its rich heritage will be lost. The community has had an active past and this should never be forgotten.

The boundaries of the Hazel Creek area are the Schuyler County line on the north, the Chariton River on the west and Highway 63 on the east; the southern boundary is about eight miles west of Kirksville. The area includes the town of Fegley, two churches and an old school. It was a rich coal mining area and is still a fertile farming area.

Fegley is located on Route B, 10 miles northwest of Kirksville. Other than one house, only the general store remains. The first store was built by a man named Hatfield. It was located across the road from where the present store is. The first store burned down and a new structure was built on the east side of the road. The new store was built by Sam Halley, and opened June 16, 1902. Dewey Sevits said, “People came from as far away as five miles or even further to trade at Fegley, both at the store and the mill.”

Between the years of 1913 and 1926 the store changed hands four times. March 26, 1926, Herman and Lena Miley purchased the store, and they owned it for 50 years. The store was closed in February 1976.

Francis McCabe, a life-long resident of the Hazel Creek area, gave us the following information on how Fegley got its name: “The place was named Fegley after a German farmer, Dave Fegley. The Fegley farm is still there, but the Fegleys are gone.”

Coal mining played an important part in the Hazel Creek area; the first coal was dug before the 1860s. Mining was done in a unique way in that the farmers tended their fields in the summer months and worked in coal mines during the winter. Most of the mines in the Hazel Creek area were shallow. In some places the men dug into the creek banks where the vein was exposed. Another method of mining coal was to dig a slope into the hillside until the vein was struck. A shaft was sunk in still other places.

There were rumors of slave labor in these first mines.

This group photo of classes at the Hazel Creek School was taken around 1912. Front row, left to right are George Hargis, Leo Bell, Harvey Sevits, John Hatfield, Earnest Sevits, Leo Glaspie, Roy Findling, Frank Glaspie, John Willis, Ellsworth Rash, Fae Kirkpatrick, Cecell Felker Nichols, Sylvia Paris Vickers, Sylvia Glaspie Fowler, Edith Houston Vestal, Ellie Houston McCollough; Second row, Roy Norris, Willie Summers, Otto Bell, Dewey Sevits, Roy Glaspie, Geno Paris, Ada Glaspie Beck, Alta Findling Stiles, Jesse Rash, Myrtle Glaspie Tillapaugh, Delia Willis Dillabaugh, Gertrude Felker Wimber, Lulah Sevits May, Beulah Sevits Rhoads, Thelma Bell Sanders, Lula Findling Kenner, Mattie Stamper (teacher); Back row, Charlie Bledsoe, Jerry Bledsoe, Reed Black, John Hargis, Bert Summers, Delia Filkins Lay, Opal Willis Baker, Anna Bell Buchanan, Mabel Felker Hanlin, Alta Glaspie Newcomer, Clair Rhodes Edris, Pearl Summers Daniels, Maude Willis Sevits.
There was a Negro settlement in this area and also a log church for the Negroes.

One important event in the lives of the Hazel Creek residents was the making of molasses. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Ted and Lola Sevits, about how Jim Newcomer, a former Hazel Creek resident, made his molasses.

"When Jim Newcomer started out in the molasses business it was just a horse and cane mill. The horse had a big sweep on him and went around and around. That was really slow work.

"Later he shipped the molasses out of the mill in wooden barrels sometimes as big as 30 gallons. Like whiskey barrels at one time, the barrels were made out of solid oak. After it was shipped, a hole was drilled in the barrel."

Ted continues, "When I started to work for Jim he had a big enough operation to have a belt pulley that you could run a tractor on. He would have 10 or 12 hired men in the fall of the year.

"When he started the harvest everybody stripped cane, that is they took the leaves off. You used a board or a stick to strip it. Then you left the seed part on top. They claimed that the leaves made the molasses bitter. The molasses was the juice that was squeezed out of the stalk.

"Cutting the cane was quite a job; it was all done by hand. Two men would go along and do two rows apiece with a corn knife. They would put the heads of the cane in a pile and later it would be thrashed or fed to the chickens. About everybody would feed them to their chickens. Jim would always have enough to run them through a thrashing machine and get the cane seed.

"The pummys (pummys are the stalks of the cane after the juice has been squeezed out) had to be disposed of if you didn’t have use for them. Jim just had so many of them he’d build a shed and make a roof out of those pummys. They’d have to be pretty deep to shed the water and snow. Some would last over a year. When the pummys would come out of the old mill, they would go through a silage chopper.

"When the juice was squeezed out of the cane it went in a barrel. In the bottom of this barrel we fastened a pipe. The juice would go into a box about four feet wide and 12 to 14 inches deep. It had a tin bottom in it. When we got that full of juice then we’d run it through clay. We would go over to Frank Glaspie’s place just across the creek because that was the kind of clay Jim always said he wanted. You couldn’t use just any kind of clay. We would throw so much clay in there and stir it all up. It really looked like a mess. Then all the clay had to settle. A little pipe came out of the barrel to let the juice out to go into the pans. The juice didn’t come right off the bottom; we had the pipe put high enough that we didn’t get any sediment, but we strained it through cloth anyway.

"When we would fill those pans we would make as many as four batches. We would do this four times a day so we’d make as many as 16 batches a day. A panful would be about 50 or 60 gallons of juice. The amount of molasses made from a panful of juice depended on the desired thickness. When making really thick molasses we’d only be able to make about eight gallons from a panful.

"The molasses was sold in gallons. Right after the molasses was made, it sold for about $1.25 or $1.50 a gallon. If a lot was left over the next summer and if Jim couldn’t sell it for 50 cents, he’d give it to the hogs. Jim had stickers to put on the container when he sold his molasses. They said ‘J. A. Newcomer’ ""
There are two churches in the Hazel Creek area, the Hazel Creek Union Church and the Hazel Creek Primitive Baptist Church. A new Hazel Creek Union Church is presently under construction.

The Hazel Creek Union Church was built in 1896. Peter Voelker was the head carpenter. The seats and the Bible stand that Voelker made in 1896 are still being used today. A member of the church, Samuel Scott, had predicted that he would be the first to be buried in the cemetery, and he was, in 1896.

The Primitive Baptist Church is older than the Hazel Creek Union Church by only eight years. It was built in 1888. The founding date for the organization of the Primitive Baptist was 1843. The Hazel Creek Primitive Baptist is a leader of churches in that denomination and holds an annual summer conference.

The Hazel Creek School was built in 1903. At one time about 100 children attended the school. Now the building is used only for storage.

More and more people are hearing about the Hazel Creek area due to the proposed construction of a new city reservoir. By writing this article we are recording some of this area's history before it is forgotten.

The photos on the left are of the general store in Fegley, Mo. Other than one home, it is the only Fegley building still standing. Herman and Lena Miley purchased the store March 26, 1926, and operated it for 50 years until they closed its doors February 1976.

This photo of the Hazel Creek School was taken around 1913, when the school was only about 10 years old. The building is now used only for storage, but at one time as many as 100 students attended school there.
A good place to raise cane...

Jim Newcomer ran a successful molasses business in the Hazel Creek area for several years. In the final stage of the new city reservoir, the lake will be about one mile south of the Newcomer farm. The Hazel Creek bottom pictured in the lower photo is the same land on which Jim produced the cane used for his sorghum. Jim is seated on his tractor in both photos, which were taken in 1949 with Eugene Locke, former MFA tank wagon driver. These photos appeared in the April 1949 issue of the Missouri Farmers Association Publication.

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Fegley Store photos courtesy of Mrs. Lena Miley

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