



Smithville MO Historical Society
www.smithvillemissourihistory.org

Preserving the past for
appreciation in the future.

April 2025

Please Patronize Our Patrons

Damien Boley
Brewer Insurance Agency
John A. Dillingham
Hixson Klein Funeral Home
Jean's Flowers & Gifts
John & Taina Weedon
Zuma's Mobile Pet Grooming

Mon. April 7, 2025

Society Board Meeting at 6:00 pm
American Legion, 92 Hwy

Society Tea: June 7, 2025

Hostess: Arlene Smith

A few spots remain. To save a spot
call Carol Dawkins at 303-902-8146



Society Awarded Another Grant

Dewayne Knott announced that we have received another grant from Freedom's Frontier in the amount of \$2,500 for the installation of a sidewalk with A.D.A. compliant width to connect the handicap ramp to the front sidewalk. Dewayne is making arrangements for installation.

Chili Cook-off & Sweets Auction

On Saturday March 29th we held our event to welcome Spring at Smithville United Methodist Church. Thanks to all who attended for their generosity. Winners of the chili cook-off were Richard Hadley, Harold Smith, and Dawn.

Unraveling a Mystery of the Dead

A recent survey as established that there are 48 cemeteries and family burial plots in Platte Township. It is estimated that Clay County has over 300 family burial plots (distinguished from public cemeteries). When a forgotten family plot is found, there is usually a mystery of the dead to be unraveled. Such was the case of the Young & Gunn family burial plot off the west side of Mt. Olivet Road north of 144th Street. The plot is now sectioned off in a new housing development. The history of the people buried there is fascinating.

An intact memorial stone remains for Abigail Gunn, born 1799. Her maiden name was Strode, a family that is well documented in pioneering history. Abigail's immigrant ancestors were English Quakers who traveled by ship from Holland to Philadelphia. Tragically, the parents died at sea. Their children were cared for by other passengers, then were "bound out" by the Philadelphia Orphan Court until they reached legal age. We fast forward now to the Strode family adventures in Kentucky. The Strodes crossed the Cumberland Gap with Daniel Boone and established several "stations" (fortressed villages) in Kentucky. Abigail's grandfather, Cpt. John Strode, who served in the Revolution, founded Strode's Station at Winchester in Clark County. The Duncan and Rice families, early settlers near Smithville, also lived at that station. Cpt. James Duncan married Abigail's aunt Elizabeth Strode in 1777. The families migrated to western Clay County around the same time. Cpt. Duncan built the Baptist Church and schoolhouse that served the area.

Abigail Strode married Thomas Young in 1817. They arrived in the Smithville area in 1836 after acquiring 170 acres in Township 53, Range 33, in Sections 30, 31, and 36 by using his land bounty for service in the War of 1812. Unfortunately, Thomas died the next year, leaving Abigail to run the farm and raise 10 children on her own (two daughters had already married in to Jesse and Corum families). Woodford Jesse and John Wilkerson administered probate of Thomas' estate. The court granted Abigail a lifetime dower interest in 144 acres of the land, which was divided among the 12 children. Her son Joseph Robert Young was a founder of Valley Falls, Kansas where he became a prominent businessman, councilman and city marshal. Calvin Smith would also relocate at Valley Falls when things heated up in Smithville during the Civil War. Another son, Stephen Young, served as captain in the Home Guard for Platte County during the Civil War. A daughter, Elizabeth Jane, married Robert Breckenridge and lived in Smithville until she died in 1911.



So back to Abigail. A neighbor, Thomas Jefferson Gunn, lost his wife in 1839, perhaps as a result of childbirth, leaving him with two young children to raise. In 1840 T. J. and Abigail formed a new marital partnership. T. J. chose to fight for the Confederacy, enlisting in January 1862 for one year at Springfield, Missouri. The 1880 federal census shows Thomas and Abigail farming on their own with his son James and his family farming next door. While the census reported that Thomas could not read or write, he became a Clay County Judge (commissioner) in 1872. They farmed the land where the burial plot is located. Abigail died in 1887 and was buried in the Young plot. Most headstones are pieces of natural stone without engraving now visible. It is believed that Abigail's first husband, Thomas Young, is buried in the plot. Another monument was raised :in Memory of William Elizabeth and Malinda Gunn." Thomas Gunn remarried in 1894 and moved to Ray County, where he remained for the rest of his life.

One Hundred Years Ago in Smithville

News in 1925 editions of the Smithville Democrat Herald from microfilm at the Clay County Archives.

April 3, 1925

The annual meeting of the Older Boys and Girls of Clay County was held in Excelsior Springs. The State Education Board has issued letters recognizing outstanding scholarship and sportsmanship to Oram Major, Lester Millis, LeRoy Shinn, Gilbert Summers and Hortense Yates. New postal rates for into effect on April 15: two cents for postal cards, an additional 15 cents for special delivery. First class rates remain the same. The Clay County Woodmen met recently to select delegates for the state convention to be held in Excelsior Springs in May.

April 10, 1925

Results of the local election: Dr. E. C. Hill, school board president; John Waters, vice president; John Morton, treasurer; and A. C. Layton, secretary. Charles Shinn was elected mayor and A.M. Brooks, T. E. Doberly, and George Breckenridge as aldermen. John R. Woods has passed away. He was born here in 1844, a son of Kemp Woods. He was president of Farmers Bank of Smithville and the Bank of Nashua. He was a major supporter of the election to issue bonds to build paved roads in Clay County and his efforts led to the first rural delivery routes out of town. He owned Elmwood Stock Farm for over 20 years, breeding shorthorn cattle.

The state legislature has passed a bill that will allow Clay County to become a modified accredited county to combat the spread of tuberculosis in livestock. Last year the county disposed of all tubercular cattle: 5 cows per 1,000, with compensation to farmers. Clay County could be the first TB free county in Missouri.

April 17, 1925

The State Superintendent of Schools has sent a letter to Smithville stating he is "pleased with the general high character of work being done at your schools.:

Lewis Jesse has fully recovered from the shock he received from a bolt of lightening that did damage to his farm.

Residents of Paradise went to Liberty last Tuesday to take preliminary steps calling for a special election to approve a \$10,000 bond to build a new schoolhouse large enough to accommodate a second year of high school work.

A horse, saddle, and bridge were stolen from the Hornbeck farm. A \$30 reward is offered for its return.

April 24, 1925

Miss Bernice Wagie, teacher at the Hoover schoolhouse was surprised on the last day of school when parents arrived at noon with baskets full of find edibles of all kinds.

The Junior class play is "Welcome Home Jimmy" and the Senior class is putting on "Holly" with some of the most elaborate staging ever produced here.

The High School attendance contest will give the winning class a holiday during the last week of school. So far the Freshman class is in the lead with only a few days less than 100% attendance.

Dorothy Lear Asher will teach at South Gale school next year.

The vocational agriculture class recently visited Riley Potter's farm to judge sheep and the McComas farm to judge mules.

Paving work is beginning at Smith Corners, and will extend to Grayson and Gower. The construction firm expects to lay two miles of payment a month.

The Kansas City to St. Joseph hard road should be completed by Thanksgiving.

C.C. Kindred reports that the railcar load of cars received last week have all been sold.

Every family in the Rocky Point school district attended the closing day exercises and basket dinner.

Miss Golden was offered an increase in salary to return next year but has accepted a position in the Smithville schools.

2025 Officers:

K.D. Stafford, President

Carol Dawkins, Vice-President

Maria Justus, Secretary

Kristine Bunche, Treasurer

Dewayne Knott- Moderator.

Society Directors:

Kathleen Bird, Carol Dawkins, Maria Justus, Dewayne Knott, Trudy LaForce, Katherine Stafford

Smithville MO Historical Society newsletter

P.O. Box 270, Smithville, MO 64089

Kathleen Bird, Editor

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We are a 509(a)(2) charity organization.