

HISTORY OF WARDELL by Eva Welch

The following History of Wardell is basically portraying the development of the town and surrounding area with modes of living, of travel, and methods of farming as I first saw it 60 years ago. Many individuals contributed to this work and brought about much change. Some of these will be mentioned.

Wardell had many tragedies through the years, as do all communities, and many personal accomplishments. Many who were born and reared in this area have attained high places in politics, government, military, medicine, education, religion, athletics, and in financial fields.

The purpose of this history is to show the development of the past 60 years, from a state of wet swampy land and woods to a very productive farming land, adding greatly to the economy of the Bootheel.

I wish to dedicate this history to the pioneer settlers of the area and those who came after who in any way contributed in the development of our community.

This is about Wardell as first seen by this writer 60 years ago and its progress up to 1979. My mother, the late Mrs. M.C. Owens and all the family except my father, the late M.C. Owens, and a brother, the late Dallas Owens arrived in Wardell January 3, 1919. My father, brother, and a neighbor arrived several days later, coming by land, crossing the Mississippi River by ferry at Hickman, Kentucky. They were bringing the wagons, mules, horses, cows and chickens.

Those of us who came by train boarded it about 8:00 p.m. January 1, 1919, at Gibbs, Tennessee near Union City. We arrived in Memphis several hours later. We had a layover until early morning. We then boarded a Frisco train and arrived in Hayti in early afternoon. There we had another layover before we were able to get a train to Pascola. My mother and smaller children spent the night with the late Mr. and Mrs. John Fields and family who were old time friends from Tennessee. The older children, including my oldest brother, Oscar S. Owens and wife Laura, who were newlyweds, spent the night at the hotel. They were also making Wardell their new home. Early the next morning we boarded the train which would take us to Wardell. To our surprise, when it switched to the track going to Wardell, it consisted of an engine, one box car and a caboose. We rode in the caboose. All we saw was woods until we came within about two and a half miles of the Charlie Haynes farm. It is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. W.O. James, who reside in the same place. The house has been changed somewhat but kept in good repair.

When we arrived in Wardell, the depot was a boxcar stationed just across the street, North of where the City Hall now stands. Freight and mail were unloaded here, and passengers got off the train. Our furniture and farming tools were being shipped by chartered railroad car and did not arrive for several days. So we spent this time in the homes of friends who were formerly from Tennessee. They had moved to Missouri a few years earlier.

Wardell was a small place with about 45 families living here. It had 5 stores, owned by the late T.M. Stoffle, Luther Peragon, Ed Brown, Leonard Brown, and Ben Barkovitz now of Hayti. A barber shop, a hotel and a post office were located in the T.M. Stoffle store. There was also a blacksmith shop and two church buildings. The Baptist Church at the present site is part of the original building, and the Church of God, as it was called then, is now the Nazarene Church. It is at the original location, but it has been remodeled.

The two-room school building was located on the corner of what is now Maple and North Street on the east side of the street. Terrell Thompson and his sister, Bernice, were teachers. The school was moved from there in 1920 and a four room building built on the present site of the oldest high school building. In 1923, a two-story brick high school was built west of where the present kindergarten and first grade building are located. The present high school building and gym were built later. Other buildings were added as needed.

We also had a rural elementary one-room school known as Penhook. It stood across the road from the Wallace farm on the East and the Mathis farm on the West. The late Mrs. Nettie Reeves was the teacher. She lived in Wardell and walked two and a half miles each day.

One could not go more than two and a half miles from Wardell in any direction without coming to woods. To get from Wardell to any other place, you had to go through Portageville. I remember my first trip to Caruthersville to attend the American Legion Fair. My husband and I and some friends went through Portageville and then the road over the dump, as they called it then, down by the side ditch, now called the Bay on the East side of the road. It, of course, was a rough dirt road and it continued around the levee from the Concord area far from the present road. This is now farm land.

Several farms of the area were being occupied by the original homesteaders or their children. The Uncle Pete Hickerson farm was occupied by he and his sister, Aunt Liz, her son, Obie and daughter, Eunice, and Uncle Pete's two sons, Henry and Lee and their families. A portion of the land originally owned by Uncle Pete was the farm purchased by my parents. He had previously sold it to the late J.H. Walker who sold it to my parents.

Mr. Charley Coats lived Southwest of Wardell on another farm homesteaded by his ancestors. Jim Hill lived on the farm Northeast of Wardell which his father had homesteaded. Mrs. Lynie Dell Moore of Wardell still owns a farm northeast of Wardell which was homesteaded by her grandfather, Crockett Warren.

The railroad that came through Wardell continued on North to a little place called Frailey and Old Carver. The railroad was the only means of mail or supplies being brought into the area.

Acres and acres of timber land was owned by the Himmelberger-Harrison Land

Company. Gideon and Anderson owned a sawmill in Gideon which was just a small village. They had leased timber rights. What was called a dummy line railroad track went far into the wooded area. Many flat cars filled with logs were hauled out daily. Timber cutting was a source of livelihood for many who lived in the area.

There were boarding houses built in the deep woods for those desiring to stay and work in the timber. One was operated by Jimmy Randell, affectionately called "Uncle Jimmy", and his wife, Aunt Frona. The lat John Clayton and family also operated in other camps. Numerous persons made what they called "mud boats" and hauled blocks in the area with mules. Persons living there came out in wagons or rode on a hand-car on the railroad.

These woods were also the home of many animals: wiild hogs, wild turkeys, coons, bobcats, and packs of wolves. The wolves ventured just outside our yard and caught large pigs from the fenced lot. When we were awakened by the squealing of pigs and the fighting of the mother, the wolf dropped the pig before we could get the gun. It was a common thing to hear wolves howling at night and turkeys gobbling in the morning. There was a free range and cattle and hogs ran in the woods. I remember one day a fully grown young heifer of ours came in with her back all scratched and her tail bitten off. We knew she has survived a wolf attack.

Wood was free for the cutting. After crops were laid by, as we called it, in the summer the men would take to the woods and cut the wood for winter. Long ricks of heater wood and cook stove wood would be ranked at most homes. Others cut it as they needed it. The woods, being an open range, were used by everyone especially those who dealt heavily in livestock production. I have seen herds of cattle come out of the woods many times to sleep in the open. Owners would go into the woods occasionally and put out salt in various places for the cattle. In the winter and summer people would feed their milk cows to keep them coming home regularly. Many cows wore cowbells around their necks to help the owner locate them. This writer still has one of the cowbells worn by one of our cows. After crops were finished in the summer, work animals were also turned out in the woods. They usually came in often for extra feed. My father had a nice pair of mules that failed to come home. A search was made by members of the family and friends but no trace was ever found. Years later he heard of a pair of mules which fit the description which were seen in the area around Big Lake, Arkansas. He believed these were his mules that were stolen. Those who had many cattle had them branded with their initials on the hip or with a metal tag in their ear.

The woods were also filled with many luscious blackberries and some fruit-bearing trees, such as wild plums, persimmons, walnuts, hickory nuts, and wild grapes. There were cane thickets and sloughs. One day Herb Johnson, a neighbor, was in the woods in the Northwest section of what they called the New River. He came upon a pup whose mother was not nearby. He cut a forked limb and placed it on the pup's neck and caught it. It was too young to put up much of a fight, so he brought it home. On the way he stopped by our home to get a drink of water. He kept the wolf until it was nearly grown, hoping to use it as a decoy. It became rather mean, so he killed it. I remember seeing Arthur Fisk with a bobcat he had killed tied to his saddle. It almost touched the ground.

He and his father were great hunters and trappers. He lived in a small house on the West side of the road where the Citizens Gin now stands. The railroad ran in a Northeast angle after it crossed the dirt road running East and West through Wardell. It came to a bend where the blacktop now runs, and turned due North. The blacktop road now is on the exact path of the old railroad bed. The houses which now comprise North Wardell were then part of the farm owned by the late J.H. Walker. My father rented it and farmed it for several years.

There was one gin in Wardell. I do not know the owner's name. It was on the very location where the Citizens Gin is now located. It burned in 1922. It was operated by steam. The whistle blew so lonesome while it was burning. Farmers had to haul their cotton to Portageville. Sometimes it took four horses or mules to pull the wagons. Most all of the cotton. Most of the cotton was sold in the seed. The farmers saved their seed; not only cotton, but also seed corn, sorghum, and wheat. At that time, soybeans were not grown in row crops. I remember my father sowing then broadcast at times, and cutting them for hay. Some people also planted them in corn. It was not planted thickly as now. Fields were under fence, so when corn was gathered, the fields could be pastured for the winter. This was not only beneficial for the stock, but also for the land. Commercial fertilizer was not on the market then. We have made two bales of cotton per acre on land with no commercial fertilizer. Years later rice was grown and soybeans became a major crop.

People did not think electricity would ever be available in the country, not even in small towns at that time. Kerosene lamps were used on the inside and kerosene lanterns on the outside. Hunters used carbide lights. The stores in town used hanging gas lights a few years later when they had a delco lighting system. The stores handled groceries, dry goods, hardware, etc. Since there was no refrigeration, they had only dry salt or bacon meat or cured hams. They had a large pickle barrel and a cracker barrel and small kegs of kraut. Most of the farmers and day workers butchered hogs in winter. Neighbors would help each other. In the fall, some farmers would butcher a hog or a beef and have an open market on the street or peddle it in the country. This was the time when beef was purchased. When you went to a larger town where refrigeration was available, you only bought it in small amounts as you had no refrigeration at home.

In 1922, Mr. Runyan from a Northeastern state came to Wardell. He and those he persuaded to be stockholders organized the Bank of Wardell. It was set up on the West side of the road in the North side of Wardell. The post office was also located in the same building as the Bank of Wardell. On October 8, 1923, the entire business including the hotel owned by Bud Dillard burned to the ground. The fire was set off by an oil cook stove in a small restaurant owned by the late Leonard Walker. Mr. Walker was attending the funeral of Mrs. John (Betty Lomax) Mathis and had left the restaurant in charge of a young man, the late Ershel Wisener, when the accident occurred. The restaurant joined the store owned by Mr. Bob Barkovitz, and adjoining his store was the late T.M. Stoffle store. The fire spread rapidly. Wind carried the flames from one building to another, with nothing but a bucket brigade to fight it. When it was over, the entire business section except for a small store owned by the late Leonard Brown was burned. His was

some distance to the North. Everyone who could get there assisted in carrying out as much as possible. The bank also burned and the post office. Temporarily, it was set up in the Brown store. Time passed and the town began to rebuild. More stores were built. A drug store, a bank, and some of the businesses were rebuilt. Some remained in the same location.

The land was beginning to take on a new look due to the Little River Drainage Company. They had dug a number of ditches. They began in 1907 in the Northern area and were continuing to work. Little River had been channeled clean and diverted in certain areas in 1915. The large ditches to the West known as the Floodway Ditches were still being dug. Some floating type dredge boats were being used. The year preceding the drainage only small areas were in cultivation. I remember the statements of an older citizen who said that in the earlier years he could have purchased a whole section of land for a yoke of oxen. At that time, there was no vision of the future when this would be the finest farm land in the county. Even 60 years ago no one would have had a vision of a gravel or hard top roads all over the area. In reality we owe all the progress to the foresight of the engineers who planned the drainage and did the work.

In 1924 when Mr. O.P. Tilghmon and wife and Mr. Luke Davis, his wife and children, Betsy and Litley moved to Wardell from Arkansas. They, along with several other farmers of the area as stockholders, put in a gin. Within a few years, they rented a large portion of land known as the Wardell Land Company which was owned by the late A.B. Brinkman and relatives of St. Louis. Most of this land was still in woods. It was leased to many families who moved into the area and cleared it. This land was located Northeast of Wardell, Mr. Tilghmon and Mr. Davis opened a store in Wardell and furnished the renters and workers with needed items. Through the years, the payments for these were made at harvest time.

In 1924 Mr. T.M. Spidell, Mrs. Spidell, and their little daughter, Lucille, moved into this area from Memphis. Through his negotiations the former Himmelberger-Harrison lands were sold to McGinley Land Co. of Chicago. In 1925, he leased much of the land in 40 and 80 acre tracts to persons who came in from other states. The people began to clear the land and build homes. Much of the timber had already been removed for lumber by the Gideon Anderson Co. of Gideon. He had two sawmills on the West side of the floodways. One was previously owned by the late Bud Dillard. Many cypress trees still remained on the land and much valuable lumber was obtained from them. When they first came into the area, they moved into the edge of the woods known as Edwards Deadening. I am told Mr. Edwards owned much of the land in time, but this was prior to our coming here.

In 1927, Mr. O.H. Acom, his wife and daughter, Sarah Ruth, from Texas bought a farm Southwest of Wardell known as the Tant farm. Later he bought a section of land and continued to buy more throughout the years. The Mississippi River overflowed in April of that year, breaking the levee in the New Madrid and Cairo areas. The water came across the land and was held North of this area by the large bank of the Bay Ditch. Although it poured into the large drainage ditches including the floodway ditches and

back out Eastward into the Wardell area. Families had to come out from all the lands West of Wardell. Little River backed up, and the flood waters reached East as far as the railroad running North from Wardell before it started receding.

In the year 1934 Mr. Acom put in a gin at the location now occupied by the Citizens Gin. This was the second gin in Wardell. This added to the benefit of the farmers since many acres of cotton were grown with a high yield. Sometime around 1935, Mr. T.C. Pinkley of Portageville took over a gin owned by East St. Louis Oil Co. This made a third gin. It was located where the soybean and delinting plant of Citizens Gin is now located. All three gins did a good business. Then cotton was picked by hand. There were many families living in the area. I can recall at least 70 houses within a two-mile area from where I lived adjoining the Brinkman farm. People from the Ozarks of Missouri and Arkansas and other places came into the area to pick cotton in the fall. In later years, bus loads of pickers would come from as far as Cairo, Illinois. I remember when Mr. Tilghmon bought and developed a large farm Southwest of Wardell. He had a central house with a farm manager living there with a very large barn for the mules that were used to farm the land. There were also many houses for laborers. It was a common sight to see a wagon loaded with farm people come into town on Saturday. The wagon was pulled by four mules and all the roads were dirt. Mr. Tilghmon owned a large store which carried groceries, dry goods, hardware and other items.

The late A.B. Brinkman, the late Charley Grewe, and Leonard Epstein of St. Louis took over the Brinkman farm in 1919. They lived in the house presently occupied by Mr. Carlos Arbuckle III and baby. They owned the Peterson Farms. They also had a large barn, a blacksmith shop, a windmill, and a commissary. They furnished their laborers with supplies at that time. Mr. Grewe married Miss Hazel Broadhacker of Portageville and they lived there. Mr. Brinkman was elected as Missouri Representative and had great influence in the blacktopping of the state road. He bought the Tilghmon gin in 1937. He sold his farm to the late O.H. Acom in January 1956. The farm is still owned by his heirs, Glen and Sarah Ruth Acom Peterson.

The Wardell schools as we mentioned before consisted of a two-room building along with a one-room school located at Penhook, and a one-room school located about four miles Northeast of Wardell called the Hill School. A one-room elementary school was added in 1926. It was about two miles Northeast of Wardell and called Riverview. Within a few years, it was decided to consolidate Riverview, Hill and Penhook. Miss Iva Lou Wallace and the late Mrs. Minnie Mathis Harms were the first graduated from the new high school in the year 1925. Mr. Harold Jones was the first superintendent of the county. This class and the class of 1928 consisted of two graduates. John R. Owens and the late Carmen Godair Owens were members of this second class. These were the smallest classes to graduate from Wardell. The school consisted of 73 students.

In 1940, there were 1500 students enrolled at Wardell. At this time the Charles G. Ross School had been built, but then it was an elementary and junior high school. High school students from Wardell, Hayward, Concord, Pascola, and Peach Orchard attended school at Wardell. The first bus was bought in 1935. The late Robert Cheek was the bus driver

for a short time. Then Mr. W.H. Clayton took over and continued to drive until 1965. He remained maintenance man until 1971. More buses were added and at the present time there are 19 buses.

The lunchroom opened in the mid thirties. Much of the food was grown on the land owned by the school. This included all the land where the latest high school building stands and Westward where the ball park and residences are. Vegetables were grown by men and women employed by the WPA. They did the harvesting, canning and cooking.

The original road West of Wardell turned South at the corner where the Osborn Funeral Home is now located. Then it turned West in front of the original home of Rube Letner, now owned by Mrs. Jones Porter. It cut through the school as of now going on West where the late John Tant house, barn, yard, and garden was located on the South side of the road. Then it angled back into the present road at the West end just East of the P.A. Watkins road. Mr. Tant was a farmer and owned some valuable race horses. He dealt in the breeding of horses and mules. The land now owned by the school district North of this road was owned by the late Rube Letner.

The Wardell road A East to 61 highway and I-55 was opened in 1930. At first it was a dirt road. Loads of sand were hauled and put on it, especially on the low area East of the Little River bridge. They used four mules hitched to a wide wooden drag to drag the road. It later became a rock road and has now been blacktopped for several years. A concrete bridge was built later. The road CC going North from junction A and CC was constructed in 1937. Prior to this time it came to the corner of the Jim Hill farm and crossed the river on the old iron bridge, the framework of which still stands. Then it continued around the river where it met the only road leading out of Wardell in earlier years and went through what was called Sandy Woods. Mr. A.B. Brinkman donated the land and the road was cut straight through, one mile North then turned East another mile in 1921. This eliminated the rambling road through the wooded area. In 1937, it was cut through the late Jim Hill Farm and between the late O.C. Clark farm on the West and the late J.R. Welch farm on the East, connecting the two ends, making a road straight through. This road was cut by WPA workers. At first it was gravel and later blacktopped in the mid fifties.

Wardell in the 20's began to grow rapidly. The first doctor was Dr. Fakes. Then there was Dr. McAlister, who lived here and practiced until the time of his death in the late 30's. He also owned farms Northeast and Southeast of Wardell. At one time Wardell had two drug stores and two doctors at the same time. In the late 30's Dr. Bussabarger came to Wardell and put in a clinic on the west side of the late F.L. Owens Drug Store. He had a few beds and an RN, an operating room, and a medical practice. Several other doctors had offices and practiced through the years, making house calls when needed. Other doctors were: Campbell, Denton, Chastain, Masters, Gullett, Hensley and Taft. Dr. Gullett and his wife, who was a nurse, lived here at the time of their death. She preceded him by a few years.. Both suffered a malignancy. Dr. Hensley also lost his first wife who was also a nurse while they lived in Wardell. She suffered a fatal kidney disease. Both doctor Taft and his wife died in Wardell.

The late Francis Dillard put in a planing mill about the year 1925. It was located where the post office, the old theater and South's Drug Store now stand. It was later moved across the street and his son, Roy Dillard, now of Clinton, KY put in a theater which opened September 1, 1940. It closed in 1955. At that time they usually had a ten-cent tickets on Tuesday nights. Many people came to town on Saturday and attended the night shows and then bought their groceries. The stores remained open till very late to accommodate them.

Prior to the Dillard Theater, the late P.E. Bussert ran a small theater in a building near his home in the central part of town. In earlier years, traveling shows, silent movies, vaudeville, medicine shows, rodeos, and even circuses came to Wardell. I remember a circus came in the fall of 1933 and pitched their tent on the location of the Citizens Gin. It had monkeys, bears, trained horses, ponies, a lion, and a large elephant which walked down the dirt road from highway 61 to Wardell. They had very good acrobats and some trapeze acts. They had a wrestling bear which several of the young men challenged, but of course, lost. At the rodeos the young men also displayed their riding ability. Sometimes they got hurt from being thrown from the bulls.

In earlier years, the ball park was located in the area between the back of the buildings and the street which is now Elm Street. This street had no more than five buildings. The area had a few trees. Several of the young men namely Jim Lee, Corbett Clayton, the late Jesse Bracy, Charles Bracy, the late Jim and Charley Hooker were among the ball players. The ball park was moved in later years to the area behind the theater and South's Drug Store which is now a cotton trailer parking lot of Citizens Gin. Baseball was more and more being played even in competition with teams from other places. However, lighting was a problem and funds for it were hard to get. Ark-MO Power had been in Wardell for some time.

The Rotary Club which had been organized in October 1939, took this as one of their projects to raise money to pay off the bank note. Money had been borrowed for the lighting system. The Rotary Club was the only civic organization in the community. They carried it into action by having a cotton carnival. The first one was held in the fall of 1940 and was a great success. They had A-1 Amusement Company Shows featuring rides, games, shows, etc each night. It usually continued for a week with a street parade on Thursday evening. The parade consisted of many floats, new types of machinery, walking horses and many other things. A queen was chosen at each carnival. Votes were gotten by making donations on behalf of a contestant of your choice. The MC was usually the late Charley Grewe, a Rotarian, who announced the activities from the top of the drug store of the late F.L. Owens. The following were chosen queen starting in 1940 and ending in 1963 in the following order: Imogene Clifton, Dorothy Riddick, Geraldine Owens, Euritha Hickey, Betty Huffstutter, Mary Nell Brockett, Betty Jo Owens, Carolyn Malone, Barbara Weaver, Letha Pemberton, Laverne Miller, Doris Jean Clark, Pat Waggoner, Wanda Depriest, Wilma Crafton, Glenda Malone, Margaret Madison, Ruth Ann Rigley, Judy Dunscomb, Sandra Gill, Donna Lawrence, Yvonne DeLisle, Melba Chastain, and Becky Bynum.

The cotton carnival was the first fall festival in the bootheel other than the American Legion Fair at Caruthersville. Hundreds of people were in attendance from many places. Prizes were given for various entries. The largest win was a bale of cotton donated by the Acom Gin. Chances were sold with a name or number determining the winner. The Rotary Club sponsored or assisted with other projects, including purchasing glasses for needy children, helping families who lost their homes by fire, donating to the purchase of equipment or supplies for the Little League Baseball Team, sending an outstanding student to Boy's State each year, sponsoring Boy Scout troops and many other worthwhile projects.

The Rotary Club was organized July 10, 1930 and chartered August 29, 1930. The Rotary Club International No. 5103 was sponsored by the Caruthersville district 135. Rotary night was held at the Wardell Gym, October 2, 1930. District governor Wayne W. Gray of Caruthersville gave the address and presented the charter. The late O.P. Tilghmon, the mayor of Wardell, gave the welcoming address. Mr. Allen Oliver of Cape Girardeau, special representative, Harold S. Jones, of Caruthersville and Mr. George W. Lincoln were among those who participated. W. H. Foster was elected president, O.H. Acom, vice-president, Sonnie Walker, secretary-treasurer, John H. Tant, sergeant at arms. The directors were O.P. Tilghmon, F.L. Owens, Doyle Hart, Sonnie Walker, W.H. Foster, Avon Knight, and Emerson Smith. Charter members were O.P. Tilghmon, J.H. Tant, Roy Dillard, E.E. Wisener, A.B. Brinkman, F.L. Owens, Bub LaFont, O.H. Acom, Allen Mercer, W.H. Foster, W.H. Fields, Sonnie Walker, W.E. Smith, Glen Peterson, Avon Knight, Norvel Long, Douglas Hart, Charlie Baudendistil, P.E. Bussert, J.M. English, Charlie Grewe, and Clayton Kay.

Mr.J.I. Burlison, his wife and two children, Ruth and Woodrow, of Hornersville, MO purchased land in 1919 across the road from my parents' farm. He still owns the land plus many more acres bought through the years. He owns the brick home where he now lives three miles East of Wardell. Mr. Burlison later purchased a store in Wardell on the corner of the street, the original Luther Peragon store. It was located across the street from where the Stop light Café is now. He did a good business and gave sale tickets for a drawing on a Model T car. It was won by a Negro lady whose name I have forgotten. In later years Mr. O.P. Tilghmon, who owned a large store also gave tickets for a drawing each week. Business was very good at the time. On Saturday afternoons the streets were lined when the drawings were held.

The Wardell High School hired their first band director, Mr. Joe English from Piedmont, MO, in the 30's. He organized and trained one of the best bands any school in the state ever had. They were number one in the ratings at Jefferson City on three different occasions in the state contests. They were also honored to play for President Truman in 1948 when he attended the American Legion Fair in Caruthersville. They met him at the plane. After his appearance at the fair, they played the National Anthem and the Missouri Waltz in his honor. Mr. English continued to be the band director for many years.

During the 40's and 50's many different stores operated in Wardell. Dry goods stores were owned and operated by Wade Hamra, Sam Hamra, Khourie, Mrs. Willard Walker, Pauline Bellah and Virgil Mathis and his wife. This writer worked some in the Sam Hamra Store. I remember the store made \$2,000 in sales one Saturday in 1955. During this year Wardell had many stores doing a good business.

In 1941 Mr. Jesse Byrd and his wife and son, Melvin "Speed" Byrd moved to Wardell. He opened a hardware store which is still operated by his son after Mr. Byrd's death. Monford Weaver operated a hardware store from 1947 until 1974 when he retired. His hardware business was bought by O.L. Glisson and son of North Wardell. They operated a store in North Wardell at the time.

In 1962 a public water system was installed with water being pumped from a well 1,970 feet deep. It was located in the center of Wardell just north of South's Café on the site of the old carnival grounds. This water system not only supplies Wardell but North Wardell and some of the homes in each direction from Wardell.

Mr. Henry Acom put in a water softener plant in 1956. This was of great benefit to Wardell and the surrounding areas since most of the water contained iron. He continues to operate this plant and also owns land in the area.

Among the things that came to Wardell in the 40's was the packing house. The first one being built by Mr. Acom on the North edge of Wardell near where the soybean and delinting building are now. In 1946 the McMinn brothers, V.D. and D.C. along with their brother-in-law Ralph Terrell took over the work. They did custom work for the farmers and also butchered for market. In 1955 they moved from there and put in the Pemiscot Packing Co. located on Little River, East of Wardell. Although D.C. moved to California, another brother-in-law, Shelby Terrell, joined the group. They continued to do a great business for a number of years. Due to Mr. Terrell's health and Mr. McMinn's deciding to retire, the business was sold to the present owner, Mr. Wayne Myracle and son in April of 1974. They continue to do a good business.

The town was incorporated in 1944 with the late O.P. Tilghmon as the first mayor. The present mayor is Andrew Hillin. A city hall, a jail and fire station were built near the center of town and located at the north edge of Little River where the railroad trestle crossed the river. The city hall was built by Chester Dillard in 1950. The town purchased a fire truck in 1953. In 1960 a rural fire truck was purchased with donations from persons of the rural area who contributed each year for the maintenance. It is kept at the fire station and has a crew of 22 fire fighters. It is the second rural fire truck in the nation. It has up-to-date fire fighting equipment. Eual Canoy is Fire Chief and Gene Young is assistant.

Since the year 1919 three other churches have been organized in Wardell. In August 1910 a small group of members of the Church of Christ began meeting in the home of J.M. Wallace. Then they moved into a small building donated by the Wallace family. In 1923 a large wooden church building was built at its present location. Several years later

the building burned and was replaced with the present brick building. The Pentacostal Church was organized in the early 40's at its present site. This building has been enlarged. The Methodist Church was built at its present location in 1953. The church was organized a year or two earlier and met in the Masonic Lodge building prior to this time. The church annex building was formerly a residential building owned by Mrs. Vera Tilghmon. She donated it to the church.

The rural telephone system began in the area in the early 50's. I received my phone in 1956. Prior to this time a telephone was located at the late F.L. Owens drug store and at Mr. A.B. Brinkman's farm. In 1924 the late O.L. Clark, Mrs. Clark and their two small children, Jewel and Carlos, moved into the area and bought a small tract of land Northeast of Wardell on Little River. He soon began to buy more land and became a very progressive farmer. He built a nice rock home and a large barn on land he had purchased. The land was formerly owned by the late R.E. Bussert and was surrounded by tributaries of the Little River called Eleven Points before it was redredged and diverted in 1915. The land was called 'Bussert Island'. Mr. Clark along with hired help cleared the land and in 1914 he put in a cotton gin, a large store, a blacksmith shop, and a machine shop. He also built several houses for employees. Several years after the gin was built, it was destroyed by fire; however, it was rebuilt in 1946 and operated until years later. Mr. Clark invested in property in Kentucky but still owned his land here. He passed away several years ago. Mrs. Clark resides at the home. Before the diversion of the Little River Channel in 1915, there were three such channels in the area around the Charlie Coats home. A story was told by Mr. Coats of being attacked by a wolf in the early 1900's while he was crfossing a stream in a boat loaded with game he had killed. The wolf jumped into the boat. He fought if with a paddle by being unable to subdue it, he grabbed his board seat which had a large nail in it and struck the head of the wolf and killed it.

The Arkansas Missouri Power Company came to Wardell in the mid 30's. Prior to that time a few merchants had installed Delco Light Plants. Some people had delco and also carbide lighting, but almost everyone still used kerosene. The REA or Dunklin Electric Cooperative came through this immediate area in 1938. The late T.R. Cole of Pascola and the late Avon Knight of the Wardell area worked diligently for this service.

Natural gas come to Wardell in 1966 or 1967 and a sewage system was installed in 1976.. Although public water had been available since 1962, each individual had to install his own cesspool or septic tank. Public Water District No. 1 now goes through much of the country in this area.

What is now known as North Wardell and Homestown south of Wardell were government built housing projects known as the Delmo Housing Division. They were built in the 30's. North Wardell, contained 50 or more buildings and Homestown 80 or more since that time. The original homes were later sold to individual owners in both places. Each had their own incorporation with Rubin Hatley as Mayor of North Wardell and J.W. Shaver the Mayor of Homestown.

Since the first mayor of Wardell, O.P. Tilghmon, till the present mayor, Andrew Hillin, Wardell has had many good marshalls. Two, I think, deserve honorable mention along with one who served as constable when the late T.M. Stoffle was mayor of the Village as Wardell was called. The late A.B. Hart who lost his life in the line of duty while attempting an arrest west of town. The offending man was also killed. Another was Chester Dillard who served from 1949 through 1951. He served in World War II and was in the infamous death march in the Philippines. He was captured on the island of Bataan. He spent 40 months in a Japanese prison at Mukdon, Manchuria and was released by the Russians August 16, 1945 at the end of the war. He arrived in Wardell December 10, 1945 after having been thought killed in action by his parents, Bud Dillard and Mrs. Dillard, relatives and friends. Another who deserves special appreciation is our present Deputy Sheriff, Gene Young, who was formerly a marshall of Wardell. He almost lost his life in an attempted arrest in 1978. He was wearing a bullet-proof vest, otherwise he would have lost his life when he was fired on several times at close range. However he does have very painful and grave injuries from bullets striking him in the lower abdomen.

Five other men who drowned while serving in the 1937 flood effort to keep the Mississippi River confined were one teenager by the name of Ballard, Clyde Scott, Robert Matthews, and Frank Ruffian. They drowned on the barge that sank in January 1937 at New Madrid. The late Robert Ramsey also of Wardell area, being an expert swimmer, made it to shore. There was another, I think, who drowned. He was the husband of Alvina Bracy and I believe his name was William Smith.

The Jimmy Osborn Funeral Home was built in 1950. A plot of land was also purchased East of Wardell from Mrs. Oliver Hendrix for a new cemetery which is now called Wardell Memorial Cemetery. Prior to this time the Rowe Cemetery South of Wardell was used. It was donated to the community many years ago by 'Aunt Betsy' Rowe as she was called. The large mound on the site of the Wallace farm West of Wardell and the Warren Cemetery Northeast of Wardell were burial grounds for Wardell. It was called the Warren Cemetery as it was originally a part of the land owned by the late Crockett Warren and was set apart for a cemetery by him. Both he and his wife and two sons, Jim and Sol, are resting there.

The late Crockett Warren was one of the early homesteaders. A portion of the land is still owned by his granddaughter, Lynie Dell Moore who was born and reared here and one of the few earlier citizens' heirs who still live in the area. Dallas Hickerson and a sister, Mrs. Gladys Hickerson Ephlin, are the only remaining grandchildren in Wardell of Uncle Peter Hickerson, another pioneer homesteader. The late Jimmy Osborn was also a coroner of Pemiscot County for several years and served on the Board of Trustees of the Pemiscot Memorial Hospital in Hayti for some time. The Osborn Funera Home in Wardell and also the one in Hayti are still owned and managed by his wife, Mrs. Evelyn Osborn.

Mr. O.H. Acom replaced the first gin he built in the thirties with a twin gin in 1949. During the following years on into the fifties both gins would run day and night seven

days a week during the peak of the cotton harvest. This gin was replaced in 1972 by an electric gin which is one of the best in the county and it still gins many bales of cotton. They also have large seed houses and many trailer sheds to accommodate farmers. Mr. Acom also purchased the A.B. Brinkman farms. He also bought the last Dr. McAlister Farm and the Bob Warren Farm. As of now, 1979, there is no wooded section in the area. The former Acom land, now the Peterson Farms, is joined on the North by the A.B. Gee farms. They own the old Frailey and old Garver lands. A granddaughter, Mrs. Charles Solomon, the former Zitella Sue Peterson and her husband own the McAlister and Warren farms plus other lands. They built a western type home and a large barn on the farm where they live.

Along with farming, they breed and show Appaloosa horses.

In mentioning the schools of the earlier years, the two-room building of East Wardell in 1919 was replaced by a four-room building on the present site of the second high school building in 1920. It is still being used as part of the present high school. The one-room Riverview School building was moved to Wardell in the early thirties and made into the first band room. The old Penhook School on the river west of Wardell was torn down and a new one erected about two miles further west on what is now the Creech farm. Due to the further development of the farm land westward and northwestward and the increasing population, another school in the Flagland area was built. A small school on the land southwest of the floodways called Tatum School was built. The teacher at Tatum was taken across the floodway by boat or what was called then a "swinging bridge" due to the bridge being out. There was also a school not far from the Floodways called Richland. The date this school closed is unavailable. It was difficult to get to Wardell High School because students in these areas also had to cross the swinging bridge or boat across. Finally some were bussed to Kennett or Gideon due to the damage to the bridge before the regular bridges were built.

In the days before buses, all children walked to school. Some walked as far as two or more miles. Often on bad days a father would bring his children in a wagon to school, picking up children enroute. Some children who were in high school and had too far to walk would ride horses. Stables were built on the land near a part of the ball park. Before the lunchroom in the thirties, all children carried their lunches to school, some in small buckets, some in paper bags, others in lunch pails with a container for milk. However, pump water was the usual drink.

Activities children enjoyed in school included various games which included softball and baseball, relay races, jumping rope, playing marbles, leap frog, playing on the slides and swings and many other activities. Recess was at 10:00 in the morning and 2:00 in the afternoon; then there was the noon break for lunch. School was dismissed at about 4:00 in the afternoon. There was also entertainment for both children and parents, such as school carnivals, track meets, spelling bees, cipher matches, pie suppers and box suppers. The suppers were a selling affair with the proceeds being used for some school project. Large groups of young people would walk for a few miles properly chaperoned and enjoy these immensely.

In those days it was common for eight or ten young people to be dinner guests in the home of friends. This was expected and enjoyed by the parents. On the Fourth of July there were many family barbecue picnics along with friends. A basket dinner with barbecue meat prepared by men the night before and a large wooden barrel of ice cold lemonade and homemade ice cream would be enjoyed.

The town usually had a barbecue and square dance. The music was supplied by old time fiddling, guitar and banjo picking. Phonographs, as they were called, were not available until later. The first radios, battery operated, came into a few homes in the mid thirties. In 1920 a two-winged airplane was engaged to come to Wardell on the Fourth of July to take passengers for a ride. The late Grada Swift Wallace, then a single young lady, was one of the passengers. Her father, the late J.T. Swift, had secretly, for fun, asked the pilot to do the loop-the-loop in the air. He did and brought the crowd down with laughter, except for those who became excited including the young lady.

Little River Drainage completed the ditches in this area in 1930. They had dug ditches running east and west one mile or more apart, emptying into the large floodway ditches on the west running south to Big Lake, AR. The Mathis Ditch, the Stoffle Ditch, the Hickerson and Garver ditches running west had been dug prior to 1919. Also some of the flooding ditches were dug prior to this time. Others continued to be dug until 1930. These ditches continued to be maintained by the Little River Drainage and paid for by the drainage tax levy. Mr. Acom did criss-cross ditching on many acres of the land he owned after the remaining timber had been removed. Timber was cut and hauled to a saw mill in Wardell owned by Acom and Tilghmon. Acom was well equipped with machinery for ditching since he owned a dragline, road grader, and all other types of machinery necessary for the work.

Many of the old sloughs having been drained and filled in and land levelers having been used on much of the land, one could hardly identify where these places had existed. Most all farmers in the area were engaged in the draining and leveling of the land.

Many acres once a swampy wilderness are now farms of high productivity. Since the disengagement of the Rotary Club, due to the passing of some and the moving of others, we now have a Lions Club organized in 1971. They do some of the same types of work in civic and benevolent affairs. The first president was Mr. Edward Brogdon, present superintendent of North Pemiscot School. The present president is Mr. Harold Gene Wilson.

Since I began this writing, I learned in talking with David Wilkerson, president of Dunklin-Pemiscot Electric Cooperative, that his parents, W.W. Wilkerson and wife and family, lived in the Frailey area when the 1927 Mississippi River overflow came through there and on into the Wardell area. His father worked at the Piling Mill of Mr. Acom's. When the water came over the big ditch dump, it came with such velocity that it washed out seemingly an almost bottomless hole called the Reach. People of that area had to move into boxcars on the railroad some distance away. They said the waves with the foam they created looked like clothes flapping in the wind. David was a small boy at the

time. He, along with his family and others, lived in the boxcars until the waters receded. One other family I knew well lived there also. It was the late Mrs. Shaw and three sons. Ommie, the oldest, now lives in Kennett and also her mother Mrs. Johnson.

R.W. Stanford and wife now of Clarkton operated a chicken business with a large number of laying hens. They sold eggs commercially on their farm a mile North of Wardell through the 50's. The farm is now owned by the J.J. Tanner family.

There have been many people who have contributed in various ways by being upright citizens and rendering services in whatever field, whether it was business, farming, teaching or an employee.

In the earlier years, many of the teachers were single and needed a place to board. Two families who played a part in furnishing a boarding house for these teachers were the late Mr. T.M. Stoffle and wife and Mr. Willard Walker and wife. Mr. Walker passed away in the early sixties, but Mrs. Walker is still living although her health is not good.

In 1919 there were only three Negro families living in the Wardell area with one child pre-school age. In 1925, a number of Negro families leased tracts from the McGinley Land Company, under the management of the late T.M. Spidell. A school was built about one mile west of Wardell, called Hodgins School. The Negro people built a church near the school and purchased land for a cemetery. As the population grew, the four room building at Wardell Central was moved there and later a brick building was constructed. There were several black families in the Riverview and Clark vicinity. A small school was erected on the east side of the road leading to Hill School on what is now the Clark area. These were elementary schools and the high school students were bused to Hayti by the Wardell School System.

Schools were integrated in 1963. Since that time high school students attend Wardell Central School. Kindergarten and first grade also attended Wardell for several years after the consolidation of the county schools. They were: Hill, Penhook, Richland, Flagland, Tatum, Ross Junior High, Pascola, Concord, Hayward and Peach Orchard. The school was changed to North Pemiscot in 1965. Classes continued to be held at various schools. Pascola had second grade; Peach Orchard had third, fourth and fifth; Ross had sixth, seventh, and eighth; Hayward had headstart, Central and the AEOC warehouse. The Hodgins School had headstart until 1976. Since then the high school students, kindergarten, and first grade continue to be at Wardell Central. All the other elementary classes are held at Ross Central and Junior High Schools. Classes for the severely handicapped are held at Peach Orchard and Headstart is held at Pascola. The High School Band, the High School FHA meetings are conducted at the gym at Wardell Central. Graduate exercises Baccalaureate services, high school and junior high basketball games are played at Ross. The Little League basketball games. The Christmas program and sometimes choruses are held at the Wardell gym.

In 1972, two-family houses were built on the O.C. Clark land. The land was originally owned by the late Ed Brown. Mr. Brown and family were residents of Wardell in 1919

and continued to be until the time of his passing in the early forties. They always grew a large garden that ran west of the house all across the northern project on into the Morris Fisher place.

There are only five people now living in Wardell who were living here in 1919. There are also only a few residential buildings that were here then. Namely ten, which have been remodeled and kept in good repair. In the country area there are only 9 now livable. A few others are in ruins. My parents' old home, one mile north of Wardell now owned by Mr. Allen Clowers is the only one north of Wardell. The house has been cut down to one story from the two story original with an attic room upstairs. The old concrete cellar my father built is still good protection from storms. Most of the pecan grove he set out still yields pecans. The Clowers family own the home site plus ten acres of land. The great portion of the land is owned by a brother, B.T. Owens. Northeast of Wardell, the home of Jim Warren still stands, having been slightly remodeled and kept in good repair by his daughter, Mrs. Lynie Dell Moore, the only living child. The large barn burned several years ago.

The Frisco Railroad was the dividing line between east and west Wardell in 1919. Families living west of the track were: Walter Shepard and family, P.E. Bussert, the Terrell Thompson family, the Mitchell Hogan, Sr. family, Luther Peragon, Johnny Randell, Francis Dillard, Mrs. Gill and two sons, Lon Thomas, Rube Letner, Sam Hogan, and John Tant. On the east side lived the following families: Bud Dillard, owner and operator of the hotel, Lee Clark, T.M. Stoffle, John Sawyer, John Hickerson, Alfred Anderson, John Moses Miller, Grandma Martha Thomas, Mollie Warren, John Winters, Lawrence Brown, Lon Atwood, Leona Gibson and daughter, Nina Belle Hampton, Arthur Bracy, Ben Barkovitz, Bob Warren, Henry Harris, Arthur Fisk and his father, the Bridgeman family, Bill Clifton, J.T. Swift, Ed Brown, J.M. Wallace, Charlie Wilson and his mother, Mrs. Lee Wilson, Aunt Delia Bracy, Bob Lee Wilson, Clyde Reeves, and Ollie Cheek. All the above parents have passed away with the exception of Mrs. Eva Shepard who lives with her daughter in Steele, MO.

Families living in the country within a two and a half mile radius of Wardell included the Bud Walker family, the Norman Moore family, Mrs. Cora Russell and children, the Charlie Coats family, the Eddie Randell family, the Charlie Haynes family, the Henry Shufflebarger family, the Kinch Mathis family, Jim Welch and sons Robert and Willie, the John Mathis family, the George Letner family, Jesse Frand Edwards and father, Jim Hooker family, the Irvin Mathis family, Harry Duncan family, the Kirkpatrick family, the Lee Hickerson family, Henry and Leonard Hickerson families, Uncle Pete Hickerson, Aunt Liz Hickerson and granddaughter, Eunice, J.H. Walker family, Leonard Walker and son, Willard; William George family; Jim Hillin family, John Clayton family, Corbett Clayton family, Frank Latham family, Jim Hill family, Clay Latham family, Ab Hampton family and his children Walter and Winnie Gray, Monroe Davis family, Sol Warren, Bill Pate family, Bill Stephenson family, Henry Wolverton family, John Wilson family, Riley Elliott family, Harley Howard family, J.D. Clayton family, the Cryder family, William Buck family, George Mercer family, Jack Allison family, John Till family, the Tom DePriest family, W.H. Clayton family, his parents and brothers Cord and Jake; the Bud

Creasy family, the Henry Rister and Jim Rister families, Rube Miller family, Big John Miller family, the Little John Miller family, Lon Miller family, Barney Dailey family, M.C. Owens family and J. I. Burlison who arrived in early 1919 and the John Fields family who arrived later in the year. The barber shop in Wardell was owned and operated by Walter Shepard at that time and for many years after.

I recently learned that the late John Sawyer also homesteaded a small tract of land when he was a young man on the southern side of Wardell on Little River. He built a home there. He and his wife, Sarah, developed a nice farm home there. They had a garden and orchard. The home was surrounded by trees, shrubs and flowers. They suffered the loss of several children. Only one, the late Curtis Sawyer, lived to be grown and married. He was married to Pearline Fields, who lives in the home built during the later years of his parents' lives. Curtis and Pearline took care of them until their passing.

The road East of Wardell was greatly widened in the mid seventies. The road was built up in the Little River bridge area. A new concrete bridge was also built. The CC gravel road going North was blacktopped in the 50's. The first bridge on this road across Little River was a wooden bridge. A concrete bridge was built in 1947. This bridge being near my home, I boarded a man and his wife and served lunch each day for the crew of ten state bridge builders. Mr. Fred Mertz was the foreman.